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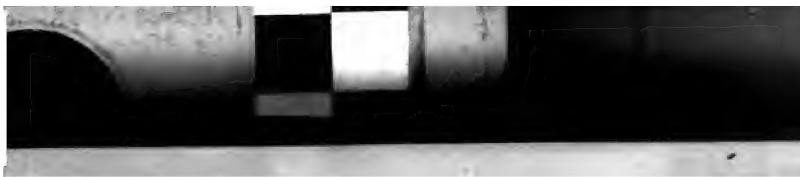
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# LOVE AND AMBITION.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "ROCKINGHAM."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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# VILLAFLO.

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“If she be false, why then Heaven mocks itself!  
I’ll not believe it.”—OTHELLO.



THE details respecting the sufferings and adventures of Antonio Perez, and those relating to the other historical personages and events alluded to in the ensuing narrative, have been gathered from the best and most accurate authorities.



# I.

## VILLAFLOR

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### CHAPTER I

ON the afternoon of the festival of the Assumption, in the year 1589, as the unclouded sun was fast advancing in his downward career, two youthful Cavaliers might have been seen issuing, upon their well-appointed steeds, from the Posada del Leon Alado, on their return to the neighbouring city of Madrid. While they slowly wended their way along the sultry and rugged banks of the Mançanarez, they freely conversed in the spirit of long established confidence and

affection, and it is to this friendly dialogue that we must first claim the liberty, gentle reader, of calling your attention.

“Indeed, you are unfair upon me, Francisco,” said the taller of the two horsemen, whose appearance was singularly prepossessing, and perhaps not the less so, on account of the warlike habits and disposition which his erect bearing and somewhat impatient eye seemed to reveal. “I can assure you, that I have enjoyed this most hospitable and excellent entertainment, as much as any of those forbidden feasts in which, under your guidance, we were wont to indulge at Salamanca in former days, and ere I had strayed so far in pursuit of the setting sun. If I have not brought back to my native land all the joyous spirits which I bore away from it, surely the reproach must rest with me alone, and not with that noble cheer with which you and our worthy host have provided us this day. Before you condemn me too hastily, however, you should remember what toil, anxiety, and sorrow, I have endured since we parted, whilst

you have scarcely had to stray further from your native city than the distance of a gentle morning's ride."

"Well," answered his companion, who seemed no less decidedly a civilian in his tastes than in his aspect, "we will not inquire what amount of care, vexation, disappointment, and unprofitable aspirations might have clung to me, as the poet hath it, even in these short excursions. As you know, however, I have the misfortune to be afflicted with a depraved propensity, which compels me ever to dwell upon the more cheerful and satisfactory view of all that I contemplate. Doubtless it is a misfortune, and a serious one, to have been deprived, at your early age, of both your parents; but, allowing for the full amount of sadness which so great and recent a bereavement must naturally cause, have you not open before you a prospect, the brightness of which might well dispel the gloomiest recollection of the past?—Are you not returned to Spain in the best possible health, with sundry advantages, which you

would blush to hear me recapitulate—a patrimony small, but sufficient to secure you independence—and, what is still better, an honourable and untarnished name? Who is to be happy at our age if you are not?”

“That is one side of the picture—now for the other, Francisco. I have lost in my father not merely the most affectionate of relatives but the only protector, and I fear, I must say the only friend, with the exception of yourself that I have in the world. I am restored to Spain, it is true, after not a few perilous adventures, with unimpaired health and strength but alas! of what avail can they be to me now, saving to supply those very energies which must be the torment of my youth as long as they are thus condemned to inaction. Had my father lived, I could have continued to exert them beneficially under his eye and care in that New World, where his own talent and the kind patronage of those who are none more, had opened to him so noble a field for distinction. But now, who will condescend to notice the claims of the descendant of an

impoverished line, the orphan son of a colonial Capitan de Guarnicion?"

"Well, but granting that all expectation of political preferment should be as remote, and even bootless, as might be imagined from your doleful accent, may I make so bold as to inquire, why you could not shape out for yourself, at the castle of Villafior, a happy and contented existence? I have often thought that were I not a clerk at the Despacho Universal, I should wish to be a rustic hidalgo de solar with my vineyards, my olive groves, my fair vassals, and my independence. What say you to a peaceful and untroubled life on the banks of the Guadalquivir?"

"What say I, Francisco! That for me, it would be neither more nor less than impracticable! Why, within three months, I should be flying from every cornfield and orange grove of Andalusia, were it only to see the king proceeding from the Escorial to Madrid, or to gaze for once upon the faces of those who wield the destinies of the Spanish empire."

"This is folly, indeed, Moriz," replied his

boon companion. "And yet, perchance, it might be dispelled by the soft eyes and still softer smiles of some Andalusian aldeana."

"Ah, Francisco, the aldeana who is to wean my heart from ambition must wear a gown of brocade, and show a hand fairer than the pearls around her neck! One day's exposure, even to the rays of what you here call the sun, would render her charms as powerless upon my soul as those of the African Mona, who was but just now grimacing round our table at the Leon Alado."

"I see there is no cure for it," resumed Francisco; "and nothing but experience, I trust it may not be too sad a one, will deter you from intrusting your bark on the perilous and treacherous waves of political adventure. However, before we proceed to examine how the frail vessel can so much as be launched, pray answer me two more questions. In the first place, how old was your lamented father when he expired last year at Mexico?"

"He was but forty-eight, I believe."

"And how many years more would he have

passed in honour, in health and in happiness, had he been satisfied with holding his natural station in his hereditary castillo of Villafior?"

"It is needless to inquire," replied the taller cavalier, somewhat impatiently. "Suffice it to say, that my father's soul could, still less than mine, have brooked for one month that life to which you were but now alluding. I am aware, doubtless, that his existence was one of much vexation and disappointment, but I have ever reckoned him to have been singularly unfortunate. Honoured in his youth by the special protection and favour of the great Don Juan, encouraged by him to aspire to the highest and noblest rewards of ambition, and then, slighted and passed over upon a hundred occasions, for no other reason than his connexion with the noblest son of Spain. Had the hero lived but for a few years more, and had Antonio Perez continued to govern, do you think that their favourite would have died in no more exalted a position than the government of the city of Mexico?"

"Most probably not indeed; but it is to

those very vicissitudes in his fortunes that I would point, with a view of dissuading you from entering upon a similar course. The favour and the very fate of the great and powerful are so precarious and uncertain, that I would ever deter any one, in whom I take a sincere interest, from connecting too closely his destiny to theirs. Excuse me, Moriz, but you see that I have not lost the habit of being your Mentor, though the difference in our respective ages can scarcely justify the assumption now, as it may formerly have done at Salamanca."

"I assure you, my dear Francisco, that I most gratefully accept your kind advice. But I must in my turn inquire, why your example agrees so poorly with your precept? Who would think, in listening to your sage discourse, that it proceeded from the favourite secretary of his Majesty's most intimate adviser."

"Pause there," rejoined his companion; "and, above all things, never brand me again with so dangerous a title, until our fair friend-

ship be converted into mortal enmity. I am no confidential secretary to Don Juan Idiaquez, but a mere clerk of the Despacho Universal; and if I am satisfied with my station, it is precisely because it is obscure, and far removed from the gaze of public jealousy. To attain that consequence, which will insure civility without exciting envy; to learn so much that it would be inconvenient to part with me, and yet not so much as might expose me to the fate of Escovedo; to secure that share of the minister's confidence which is requisite to maintain me firmly in my present position, and not so much as might involve me in his future fortunes more than would be exactly agreeable:—such are my objects and my aim. Should you feel it possible, Moriz, so far to clip the wings of your soaring ambition, as to adopt such views and no other, why then we are shortly expecting a vacancy in the Despacho, and I am not, I trust, overstating my credit, when I say, that it might contribute to your admittance among us as a supernumary escribiente. Come, is not that a prospect to cheer you?"

"I should, without a doubt, be as much gratified as flattered," replied his companion, in the same tone. "But you will scarcely keep me a week in the office, Francisco, when you have seen my handwriting. Seriously, I have not your true philosophy, your real wisdom; I cannot take life as it comes, nor rest satisfied with its homelier blessings: at any risk, at any peril whatsoever, mine must be The Loftier Range."

"Well, as there is no help for it, let us more closely examine what amount we can command of that patronage which, for the present at least, is indispensably necessary. I think I understood from you, when we first met, that your poor father wrote some letters upon his death-bed, recommending you to the most illustrious among his friends and acquaintances?"

"He did."

"To whom were they addressed, may I ask?"

"Why, one is for the Duque d'Almonacid."

"He is one among the very few of our

grandees who may be said at present to possess some political influence; but unfortunately he is now at Vienna on a special mission to the Emperor."

"That is unlucky indeed, for my father saved his life in former days, though perhaps so trifling a boon may long since have been forgotten. However, I have another letter for Don Miguel Gurrea, a cousin, I believe, of the Duque de Villahermosa. Has he, do you think, any interest at Madrid?"

"Not much to spare, I fear, and what he has, is, I should believe, long since mortgaged to every Italian or Flemish artist who can be met with in our streets. There is no more desperate fanatico in all Spain than Don Miguel for pictures, good or bad, provided they be foreign. However, the Duque de Villahermosa is at the head of the Aragonese nobility, and his cousin might perchance assist you:—without fail, you must wait upon Don Miguel.—Now for your other letters."

"I have also one," replied Moriz de Villaflores, slightly lowering his voice—"I have also

one for the late secretary, Antonio Perez, which I faithfully promised to deliver into no other hands than his."

"Indeed," exclaimed the escribiente, with a look of anxiety very far at variance with the usual expression of his countenance; "that is a missive that it were much wiser to destroy than to convey, or indeed to keep in your possession. Was your father so ignorant of the state of affairs at Madrid, as to recommend you for preferment to one so sadly and irretrievably fallen?"

"I believe that my father's letter does not concern my prospects so much as certain information which he conceived might be of service to the late secretary, and which he consequently imparted through the only safe channel at his command. The letter must be delivered, as I pledged my word to my father, on his deathbed, to that very effect;—but as he impressed upon me the necessity of a safe rather than of a speedy remittal, I will not endeavour to fulfil my promise with any precipitation which you might condemn."

"There you decidedly show your sense; and if you take my advice, you will scarcely attempt to see Antonio Perez on such an errand, until you have the truncheon of a Captain General, for the least, firmly secured in your grasp. It is a serious business enough that of Antonio Perez—it began in bloodshed; to end, how and where, God alone can tell."

"I wish, Francisco, that I could see more clearly into the matter, and know which to credit among the many versions I have heard."

"That would be as dangerous a curiosity as any with which man was ever afflicted, since that very failing caused the fall of his race. Believe me, it were far wiser to discard the matter entirely from your thoughts."

"Nay, but there is an attraction to me, which I cannot resist, in every species of danger. I must know from you, now that no one can possibly overhear us, whether you think Perez really guilty or not of the murder of Escovedo?"

"Well, I suppose I must give you some sort

we reply, to preserve you, if possible, from the peril of such an inquiry elsewhere. I will, therefore, answer your question diplomatically, that is, by another—What do you mean by guilty?"

"Why, of course, if he had any share in the execution of the deed."

"In the execution of the deed, certainly not, for he was away from Madrid at the time the rash act was committed."

"Still he might not the less have planned, ordered, or countenanced the murder."

"In which case you would reckon him almost equally guilty?"

"Most decidedly."

"Then, for heaven's sake, beware how you hold that doctrine at Madrid, Moriz, unless you are prepared to arraign, not only Antonio Perez, but also the highest in Spain."

"Indeed! What, the Duke of Alba, the Princesa d'Eboli?"

"Greater, far greater, than they."

"What! you surely cannot mean the——"

"Silence!" exclaimed the jovial clerk, ex-

tending his hand, as it were to close the lips of his less cautious companion, and then quickly raising it to his own hat, with a half comic, half serious expression of deference. "Remember, that you are no longer in Columbia, and that here every bird of the air and every breath of the wind is in league with the Holy Inquisition. Can you understand now why the subject should as soon as possible be dismissed even from our conversation?"

"Not so soon neither, Francisco, as might lead you to suppose that I could suspect you of mistrusting me. You must first explain to me what reasons of state policy could have rendered necessary or expedient the death of Escovedo, who was, neither more nor less, I believe, than secretary to his majesty's own brother?"

"Ay, but that is the most forbidden ground of all. Surely you don't believe me capable of supposing that his majesty can have been jealous of Don Juan's restless imagination, or that he could have thought it desirable that his brother should be deprived of the services

of an unscrupulous and daring counsellor, who might, in time, have imparted a more tangible form to the mere day dreams of an aspiring mind?"

"Of course you cannot harbour such a notion," said Villafior, answering the tone rather than the words of his companion.

"Nor do you entertain it for a moment either, Moriz, unless you have any particular anxiety to take up your residence in the tower of Segovia. And now, to return to what more immediately concerns us, you had better see, as soon as possible, Don Miguel Gurrea, the honour of whose acquaintance I cannot claim. I will, on my part, whenever you please, present you to Don Juan Idiaquez, my chief; you will, at all events, find him more courteous and well bred than his colleague, Moura, whose literary or polite acquirements are certainly not his principal characteristics."

"And it is upon these two personages that rests the principal political responsibility, since the death of Cardinal Granvelle?"

"Precisely; or, to speak more accurately,

they are the two principal instruments of his majesty, who now, more than ever, reserves for himself the direction of the whole. I shall procure you, I hope, a favourable opportunity for seeing both of them, and I trust that the pleasure which you will derive from beholding their countenances may not fall short of your anticipations. However that may be, there is now the steeple of Santa Maria rising high above the horizon, and I vow, that if we do not change the subject of our discourse, any friends of mine, whom we may chance to meet, will think that you have converted Francisco de Bolea into as moon-stricken an aspirant for fame as some parties that it is needless to name. With your leave, we will return to Doña Antonia, and I shall soon give you good reasons for my wish that you should pay your respects to her no later than this evening."

The conversation here did take a very different turn, and other matters were speedily re-introduced, to which it would be indiscreet on our part to allude. If, however, gentle reader, you have followed with becoming

attention what we have reported, you will have gathered as much as it can concern you at present to know, with respect to the station, character, and pursuits of our two cavaliers, Don Francisco de Bolea and Don Moriz de Villafior. As to the Señora Antonia, whose name has just been mentioned, I lament to say, that she was one whom we could not venture to present to any of her own sex, and with whom it would be full as well that our sterner patrons should equally remain unacquainted. Thus, without inquiring how the remainder of his evening was spent, we will merely say, that on the following day, Villafior, in accordance with the advice he had received, waited upon Don Miguel Gurrea, but having ascertained that the Aragonese nobleman was not expected back from Saragossa for some time, he accepted, without further delay, Bolea's offer of his support and countenance during the first interview with the renowned Idiaquez.

## CHAPTER II.

WHEN, under the guidance of his more experienced companion, our hero entered the hall where the Secretary of State was giving audience, he was still less struck by the unusual magnificence of the apartment than by the numerous and brilliant assemblage which pressed upon the footsteps of the favourite counsellor of the Spanish Crown. Cardinals, and Magnates, Envoys, were there patiently awaiting a smile of recognition or a word of welcome; Viceroys and Governors, late, present, or expectant, whose steady gaze had never quailed on the hardest fought battle

fields in the Low Countries or in France, and whose rugged features now betrayed every alternation of anxiety, hope, and dismay; dark browed Dominicans, before whom the stateliest warriors gave way; and gallant courtiers, whose costly attire showed in singular and sad contrast with the meek servility of their humble obeisance. All these, the accomplished minister greeted with the air of one long since accustomed to receive such homage as well as to estimate its value, and if few departed with much cause to congratulate themselves upon the results actually obtained, none at least could retire with any feelings of wounded vanity or offended pride. Villafior had well observed the friendly nod of acknowledgment bestowed upon Bolea, as soon as the Statesman's quick and restless eye had fallen upon them, but he was not a little surprised when he beheld Idiaquez take the first opportunity of breaking from the illustrious throng which surrounded him, to approach the remote corner where his subordinate had taken up his station.

"Ah, Señor Francisco," exclaimed the minister, with his most protecting smile, "can I trust to the evidence of my senses, and believe that I really see you here! Since when are you grown a courtier too?"

"I have been sadly remiss, I fear," replied the portly Bolea, endeavouring, in vain, to impart to his ruddy and jovial features an expression of the deepest humility. "I have been sadly remiss, I fear, in not waiting oftener of late upon your excellency in public: my best excuse must be, that I thought your excellency had full enough of my society elsewhere. In truth, I would scarcely have ventured to intrude here to-day, were I not desirous of presenting one, in whom I take the greatest interest."

"Indeed," said Señor Idiaquez, fixing for a moment upon Villafior one glance of the deepest and most searching scrutiny. "Your friend bears that about him, which, with your good word, may well insure success to all his endeavours. Is he already in his majesty's service?"

"No, Señor, but with your excellency's permission, such is his most earnest desire."

"And would it be agreeable to you and to him that I should myself mention his name to the King?"

"It is that very most gracious favour which we purposed humbly to solicit from your excellency."

"Then wait here, if you are at leisure, for a few minutes longer, and when I have succeeded in dismissing these distinguished but somewhat tenacious visitors, we can confer together upon the best means of meeting your wishes."

"How amiable, how charming he is," exclaimed the enraptured Villafior, as soon as the Secretary of State had withdrawn. "What a noble presence, what an engaging address! How happy you must be, Bolea, to possess the confidence and the goodwill of such a man, for it is clear that you enjoy both far more than you are willing to admit."

"Not at all," replied his friend; "but I have endeavoured to be useful, which is the

first of all recommendations in the eyes of the great. 'Try and be never in the way, and never out of the way,' said my father to me, when I first started in life:—such has been my constant aim, and I believe, I may say, that somehow or other, there would be a stand-still at the Despacho Universal, any day that Francisco de Bolea were unexpectedly to absent himself."

"So I should suspect, also, from what I have just observed," resumed his friend. "However that may be, I suppose that I may now apply for a captain-generalcy at least."

"Most decidedly, and obtain the promise of it also."

"The which promise to be performed——?"

"As soon as his majesty's pleasure can have been ascertained."

"That is the quarter, I suppose, Francisco, in which the principal delay might occur?"

"Come, I see that the first breath of our official atmosphere has not been quite lost upon you. The distance from this residence to the royal palace is as short as may well be, and

yet it is perfectly astounding to reckon the number of years which have been known to elapse, between the day when a very strong recommendation was forwarded from one to another, and the day upon which an answer has been received, even were that answer a single negative of the most unquestionable description. To be sure, though a king may be sometimes an inconvenient or exacting master, yet I cannot conceive what a minister would do, were it no longer in his power to say: 'I will refer the matter to his majesty'— 'I have not yet been honoured with his majesty's commands,' and so forth. Why, it would be necessary to drag a Secretary of State to the scaffold once a year at least, were he obliged to answer all applicants in his own name. But I see that my courteous patron has succeeded at length in impressing upon his visitors the absolute necessity of their retiring: I think now we may as well approach him, and do not you fail, Moriz, to state to him as distinctly as you can, what you desire."

"Well, amigo," said the minister, sitting

down, as soon as he was left alone with Bolea and his companion, "I must now inquire your friend's name?"

"Moriz de Villafior, Señor."

"Of gentle blood, I should presume?"

"Most undoubtedly, may it please your excellency. His father bore arms for nearly thirty years in his majesty's service, and died in the honourable situation of Governor of Mexico."

"He can bring with him no better recommendation to the King's favour. And now, Señor de Villafior, pray tell me, whether it is your pen or your sword that you are desirous of placing at his majesty's disposal?"

"I would willingly say both, may it please your excellency; but I believe, it is the latter that I am the least unworthy to use in so exalted a cause."

"Yet the pen is often the more efficient of the two, besides being more in our line, Bolea. Shall we place the Señor de Villafior upon our list for the next vacancy in the Despacho?"

"Well, Señor," replied Francisco, "if I

may make so bold as to state the undisguised truth to your excellency, I fear such condescension, great and flattering as it is, would scarcely meet the views and hopes which your excellency's kindness has induced us to entertain. By the blessing of God and our Lady, we, your humble servants and instruments of the Despacho, are all of us at present in the enjoyment of the very best health; the list of the applicants, whose petitions your excellency has favourably entertained, has already extended beyond our own numbers, and were our friend Villafior's name added to it, he might esteem himself a lucky man if he were still to have sufficient health and strength left to hold a pen, even were he yet alive on the day of his admission. Besides, and to conceal nothing from your excellency, I must venture to say, that some more active employment than that of the Despacho would far better suit both the acquirements and the tastes of Don Moriz. It is a pity that he returned to Spain too late for the conquest of England, or his valour and counsel might have gone some

way to replace those of the Marques de Santa Cruz, and even to second those of the Duque de Medina Sidonia."

"Well," resumed the minister, scarcely knowing whether to smile or to frown at his chief clerk's last observation, "you well know how little I interfere in all military appointments. Moura, who claims the recommendations to most of these, and whose superior qualification for such matters no one, I should conceive, could contest after the occurrences to which you have just alluded, will, I should say, have it far more in his power than me to meet your friend's most natural and praiseworthy desire. Perhaps, I had better prepare him for your joint visit, and I will not fail to say all that may best insure his favourable consideration."

Having thus concluded, the Secretary of State arose from his chair, and with the most gracious smile and bow, retired to his more private apartment.

"So much for your first day at court," said Bolea to his companion, as they, in their turn, withdrew; "and it is fair to say, that we could

scarcely expect much more at present. I have preserved you, I trust, from the honour of a desk in the Despacho, which would have satisfied your just claim in everybody's estimation but your own. In other respects, Idiaquez is right, and such preferment as might suit your views undoubtedly rests more with his colleague than with him. I could not but begin by soliciting his patronage, however, circumstanced as I am, and should he not forget his last promise, we may find Moura in a gracious mood. You must not expect from him so courteous a reception, but still I think we may venture on Saturday next to try our fortunes in that quarter."

On the appointed day and hour, our two friends proceeded together to the residence of the minister, more especially intrusted by King Philip with the direction of internal and colonial affairs, and they there found an assemblage not so brilliant, but more numerous than that which usually attended at the levees of his majesty's chief adviser upon his foreign policy. For a few seconds, Villafior looked around him in vain, to ascertain upon

whom, in that crowded throng, the care of such mighty interests could have devolved, and he discerned no one, whose bearing and appearance seemed, like those of Idiaquez, clearly to reveal and even to proclaim his exalted station.

"Can that be the Secretary of State?" said he at length to Bolea, on observing that the general homage seemed peculiarly paid to a man, low in stature, and whose features and manner appeared alike singularly forbidding.

"It is, indeed," replied Bolea. "Cannot you distinguish upon his countenance that divine light which you certainly expected to behold there?"

"You jest, Francisco, as usual, and yet I can assure you that I do observe something in his look which speaks of authority and decision. I should have conjectured, however, that he was a man more fitting to lead the first desperate onslaught of a forlorn hope than to be the subtle and ever cautious adviser of a sovereign in his closet."

"Ah!" said Bolea, "you may be both right and wrong in that observation. There is many

a man who has honourably won a pitched battle and yet had not that dauntless energy required to impose the will of one mind upon that of millions. There are more qualifications demanded than mere discretion and perspicacity to wield the destinies of that empire upon which the sun never sets."

"No doubt, indeed, Francisco. I suppose, then, that at the council board the conception and the design would principally proceed from your patron, while the execution or enforcing of the same would rest with his sterner colleague."

"Sometimes, I believe; but not always. You may be assured, however, that the more courteous and engaging exterior of Idiaquez dissembles, but does not affect, a disposition fully as relentless and as unyielding as that which our gracious host here is at no endeavour to conceal. You very probably found the polished metal of your espada de Bilboa fully as efficient and enduring as the coarser and more rugged iron which may have been shaped into weapons by some of the luckless peasantry

of Flanders, against whom your boyish valour was first called into play. Perhaps Don Christobal has, ere this, made some similar observation during the differences which may, from time to time, have arisen between him and Idiaquez. However that may be, I see that he has already twice or thrice looked our way, and it is time for us, I believe, to draw nearer to him."

No sooner had Bolea joined the circle which more immediately surrounded the minister, than Don Christobal advanced to meet him; and, with the nearest approach to a courteous smile which his rude features could command, exclaimed:

"Ah, Señor de Bolea, I am delighted to see you—your presence here reminds me, to my confusion, that I have far too long delayed thanking you for your most interesting memorandum respecting the late occurrences at Paris. Curious events, indeed, which we must study for our benefit, and not for our example. But whom have you here with you?"

"An old and much valued friend, Señor, whom

Don Juan Idiaquez has already, I believe, condescended to recommend to your excellency's especial favour."

The dark-browed statesman appeared to recollect himself for an instant, as if in vain endeavouring to recal any such communication on the part of his colleague, and then, with a good grace, which he might well have more frequently borrowed from him, merely answered :

" No further introduction than yours, Señor de Bolea, could be required by me ; may I ask your friend's name ?"

" Moriz de Villafior."

" Is he related in any way to the late Governor of Mexico ?"

" Yes, Señor, his only son."

" Indeed—a good and trustworthy officer. You have already borne arms yourself, I should say, Señor de Villafior ?"

" I have, may it please your excellency, from my earliest years, and my utmost ambition is to do so again in his majesty's service."

"Well, when the Duke of Parma next arrives in any affairs upon which he may depend, I am sure your claims will not be forgotten."

Peter Villador would have gladly have observed that all his father's misfortunes and disappointments had originally sprung from a serious misunderstanding which had unfortunately arisen between the two sovereigns and the Portuguese prince, when his business had succeeded to Don Juan in the government of the Low Countries. So powerful, however, were his faith and dependence on the intervening experience which Maria had been assumed that he was unable to give credence to any very sincere expression of his feelings. Don Christopher's assurance was called every in other direction. As no further opportunity for addressing him was likely to occur in this way, Peter returned to his friend in silence, and they respectively retired.

"Well," exclaimed the Portuguese as they descended the same staircase, "I suppose that you are greatly well satisfied with the prospect of enjoying these hours in Portugal?"

"Not at all," replied the sorely discomfited Moriz. "Surely, my dear friend, I must already have told you my strong and most just reasons for never wishing again to draw my sword under the orders of the Duke of Parma. Indeed, I would prefer that it remained sheathed evermore."

"Then, for heaven's sake," rejoined the astonished Bolea, "why did not you insinuate something to that effect in the proper quarter, instead of standing there like one entranced, and giving the Secretary of State every reason to suppose that you were perfectly overwhelmed with his gracious offer? As to me, I had no conception that you still bore such a resentful recollection of misunderstandings in which I should wager that your father was not a whit less to blame than the prince himself."

"I fully intended, Bolea, and indeed attempted to explain how the case stands with me; but to say the truth, there is something so harsh and repelling in that man's look, that it completely deprived me of my small stock of assurance."

"Then I trust that you may not have often to deal with him personally, for you will rarely find him in a more captivating mood. There was many a grey-haired veteran to-day who would have given a year of his pension to have been received as you were."

"For that, Francisco, I was indebted to you and to your presence, and not to any desire on the part of the minister to forward my views."

"It would be strange enough surely, if any one, saving of course a fair doncella, were to be so enraptured on first beholding you, as to grant everything that you could desire."

"I do not expect such concessions in any quarter, but there was that in the Señor Idiaquez's manner to me, that certainly led me to think that he was inclined to serve me. Well, is what I am saying so very extraordinary and presumptuous as again to excite your derision?"

"I am not laughing, I assure you, Moriz."

"No, but there is that accursed smile for ever lurking in the corners of your lips, which

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## LOVE AND AMBITION.

would make even a sage doubtful of his own sense."

"He would have little enough to boast of could he entertain such a thought," resumed the imperturbable Bolea. "However, my dear Moriz, I see that you are in a mood to quarrel with every one else as well as with yourself, for which, mind that I do not blame you, as it is the most natural and general consequence of inordinate ambition. I must therefore so far satisfy you, as to assure you, that you in no way provoked that last and most reprehensible smile. I was merely making an internal reflection upon the lamentable infirmity of your most affable protector's memory."

"Do you mean me to conclude, Bolea, from what you say, that the Señor Idiaquez had actually not remembered or not condescended to mention to his colleague our intended visit and its object?"

"I have said nothing at all to that effect, Moriz, and indeed can only have learned what you yourself may have gathered during our recent interview. Come, you need not knit

your brows as if you were on the point of leading on your whole prospective troop to the rescue: matters are going on as well as could be expected, and with plenty of time and solicitation, the indispensable requisites for all preferment at court, you will yet meet with such smiles from Fortune as may induce you to forget mine. But time is our best ally."

Villafior was destined to ascertain that in this last observation, as in most of those that were hazarded by his friend Francisco, the shrewd escribiente was right. We will not weary your patience or sadden your feelings, gentle reader, by a detailed recital of our hero's subsequent interviews with the two Secretaries of State, during which, being now unescorted by his former companion, whose occupations seldom allowed him a morning's leisure, he was scarcely noticed by Moura, and very civilly received, though evidently not distinctly recognised by Idiaquez. Suffice it to say, that ere two months had elapsed, so indignant and disheartened did he feel at the poor success of his endeavours to attract any share of minis-

terial attention or favour, that he would actually have retired to the dreaded solitude of his castillo, had not Bolea himself urged him not to take any so decided a step until he had seen Don Miguel Gurrea, whose arrival in Madrid was hourly expected.

## CHAPTER III.

At length the residence of the Aragonese nobleman showed evident signs of his return, and Villafior determined upon presenting himself there with his father's letter. He was introduced by an ill-appointed domestic into a long low room, where several persons were assembled, inspecting the very careful opening of a large packing-case, one of whom, upon being more than once respectfully summoned by the attendant, moved forward at last to meet the new comer.

"Is it the young artist from Venice?" hastily inquired the high born dilettante.

"I have not yet ascertained, Señor," replied the servant, as he withdrew, leaving our hero to tell his own tale, which Moriz entered upon at once to prevent the threatened misunderstanding.

"I have ventured thus to appear before you, Señor," said he, "that I might have the honour of delivering in person a letter from one, who ever esteemed you as a much valued friend. It is from Don Antonio de Villafior, my father."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Don Miguel, as he embraced his new acquaintance with every demonstration of joy and of affection. "I am delighted to see you, and scarcely less happy to hear from him. I trust he is well?"

"Alas, Señor," replied Moriz, "he is now no more:—the letter which you hold in your hand was addressed to you from his death-bed."

"You cannot mean it. Indeed, I am most deeply grieved to learn it. I had heard the sad intelligence of the demise of that much respected lady, your mother, but had no concep-

tion that we were menaced with this new loss. Truly, it is very afflicting. Shall I read this letter at once?"

Villaflor having answered in the affirmative, Don Miguel drew nearer to the window that he might peruse this last token of his friend's remembrance; but his attention was sorely distracted between its contents, and those of the packing-case above mentioned, which were now beginning more distinctly to appear. "Have a care with that chisel, Gil, mi hijo," would he exclaim at intervals, looking up from the letter with an expression of the deepest anxiety. "Valgame Dios! You must be now upon the very canvass:—remember that the frame itself is worth its weight in gold," and so forth. At length, however, he concluded his perusal, but he could not again approach Villaflor, until he had somewhat satisfied his mind by a short but intent investigation of Gil's proceedings.

"You will excuse me, Señor Moriz," said he, "but this is an original picture of the great Titian himself, whose pencil our late renowned sovereign did not disdain to raise one

morning with his imperial hand, greatly enhancing thereby his own claim to immortal fame. I have read this letter with a sad heart, and have but one reply to make, which is, that this house and all it contains are most truly at the disposal of the only son of my much honoured and much lamented friend. You cannot confer a greater pleasure upon me, than by showing that you are convinced that I am speaking in earnest. Will you excuse the indiscretion of my question"—added he, in a lower tone; "but I still remember, that when I was of your age, my purse was seldom of the heaviest: is yours at present in a condition which beseems your rank and acquirements?"

"Completely so, Señor, I heartily thank you."

"Should such ever be no longer the case, I reckon that you will not fail to let me know—also, how I can hope to serve you in any matter, for you are herein particularly recommended to my care."

"Perhaps, then, Señor," replied Moriz, much

encouraged by the kind expression and manner of his new acquaintance; "perhaps I may venture to state that I have but one object at heart, and that I believe that you, Don Miguel, have it in your power to further it."

"Indeed; I cordially trust that it may be so; and that you will impart it to me, as you would have done to your own father. But, first, come this way and see my new, my precious Titian: if you are as like your poor mother in taste as in countenance, you will well appreciate its beauties."

The subject of the worthy Don Miguel's solicitude was now nearly released from its long and close captivity, and with the greatest care exposed to the scrutiny of the enthusiastic little circle which surrounded it.

"What design! what composition! what colouring!" was echoed on every side: but the combined raptures of all present were nothing to those of the fortunate possessor himself.

"There, there!" exclaimed he, with tears, which the intelligence of the death of his friend

had not called forth, now standing in his eyes, "this is indeed the triumph of art—this the sublimest effort of that heaven-born pencil! Did Raffaele ever surpass that? Who could gaze upon that, and call the Urbinato the master of all! When did he ever throw such a light upon the living flesh of such an arm, and such a cheek as that? when did he teach the human eye thus to penetrate the soul of the beholder? And how perfect that background, how exquisitely finished is every detail!"

Thus the delighted dilettante gave vent to the feelings which overpowered him, until unfortunately the name of the Perrugino having been introduced by him with a slight accent of disparagement, one of the by-standers, a devoted admirer of that highly respectable artist, entered into a controversy upon his particular merits, which soon became general, and threatened also to become interminable.

What was in the meanwhile the frame of mind of the luckless Moriz may full as readily be conceived as described. He had waited on

Don Miguel—in former days the most devoted and intimate friend of his father—if not in the full confidence that immediate and very decisive results would accrue to him from this visit, at least in the earnest expectation that his new acquaintance would be both willing and able to contribute materially to his preferment; but what hopes of such a nature could long survive after what he was beholding? “Alas,” thought he, “my father’s memory must already have been much impaired, or his old and faithful associate be sadly altered himself, during the interval of their separation; otherwise it is not surely to this kind-hearted but doting fanatic that he would have addressed me as to one whose patronage could prove efficient. Even if I could persuade him to listen for five short minutes to what concerns my most important interests, and obtain his promise to promote them, how long could I trust that his mind would retain what I had stated; and, besides, what weight can this wild maniac’s recommendations bear with them into the councils of

those who govern mankind?" Such were the reflections to which the impatience of the disappointed youth gave rise, until, at length, despairing of being enabled again to fix the attention of the much excited Don Miguel, he thought it more prudent quietly to withdraw, and determine in solitude upon the course which it might be most expedient for him to pursue in the present emergency. His retreat, however, was not unperceived.

"Ah, my young friend, Don Enriquez—Don Moriz, I mean; I cannot suffer you to depart thus, except it be to give orders to your page to make here what establishment you may require. The house is large enough, as you see, and tenanted principally by those whose society, while it confers the greatest of pleasure, can never give the slightest annoyance."

"I am deeply beholden to you, indeed, Señor," replied Villafior; "but I trust that you will kindly excuse me, as I am under an engagement to share the apartments of an old college companion of Salamanca."

"As you please, amigo; but remember, at

least, that in my eyes, my table will always show a vacant place when you are not there."

"I shall certainly not fail to fill it some day, Señor, and then, perchance, you will be more at leisure to give me a few moments' audience."

"Of course, any day, as much as you please. But soft—let me see; were we not interrupted just now, as you were on the point of stating to me some matter upon which you believed that I could be of service to you?"

"I was indeed, sir, about to say, in answer to your own most obliging inquiry, that I thought a word from you to Don Christobal de Moura might induce him more favourably to entertain a suit that I am urging upon him for some active employment in his majesty's service."

"Moura," replied Don Miguel, thoughtfully; "a low-minded, cold-hearted instrument of the will and designs of others. What to him are the beauties of Nature and the glorious achievements of artistic genius! Have nothing to do with him, Moriz; he is no fit companion

or guide for your youth. Why, he would scarcely distinguish that noble canvass which we have been gazing upon, from the dull green cloth of the council board."

"But, my dear Señor," interposed Moriz, barely able to suppress a smile, "it is not for me a question of natural sympathy and attraction, but of absolute necessity. Don Cristobal, I am assured, chiefly disposes, under his majesty's pleasure, of that military promotion which I am obliged, and also I may add, entitled to claim."

"Entitled no doubt, mi hijo, but surely not obliged. Why should you waste your precious life in the profitless pursuits and perils of the camp, when a far surer and more exalted road to distinction is open before you? By the few words which fell from you just now, when the whole beauties of my Titian were first unveiled, I clearly saw that you have inherited your mother's soul for the arts. I will be no party in withdrawing you from your Heaven-appointed career. You must come here and reside with me; under the direction of my

much esteemed friend, Antonelli, you will make rapid progress in the use of your pencil; and whatever may be your object, whether fame, or wealth, or the purest and surest enjoyments, all will be attained without having to make one momentary sacrifice of your independence or of your priceless time in the halls of any insolent minister. Nay, I see that I am converting you, or rather that I am arousing within you the latent but undying spark by which the diviner light of your nature will be kindled; and then how vain, how fruitless, will those enterprises appear to you, into which so many will rush in blind ignorance of all the internal happiness they voluntarily forego. If you were enraptured but just now, when you first contemplated yonder masterpiece, judge what must have been his feelings who ushered such a creation into its immortal existence."

"They must have been truly enviable, indeed, Señor," answered Moriz, anxious more than ever now to escape with becoming courtesy from the strange patron, into whose hands he had unwittingly committed himself;

"that such may one day be mine, is what I most fervently hope: but the hours are flying swiftly by, and I must intrude no further upon your time."

"Time, amigo; what is time to us?" resumed the dilettante, enclosing in a still firmer grasp the unwilling hand of his youthful friend; "we have no account to keep of its progress, so slow and wearisome to others."

"So I should presume from what I have witnessed here, Don Miguel," interrupted Villafior, whose constitutional restlessness was now fairly getting the better of his good breeding. "But unfortunately, I have one expecting me without, who is, as yet, a heretic to your noble creed, and I must, I really must join him with no further delay."

"Very well, very well," answered Don Miguel; "but remember, that both Antonelli and myself will be anxiously awaiting your return."

"And that you may so await until the call of the Last Trumpet is my anxious hope," muttered Villafior, as he actually fled from

the friendly fanatic's house, with a precipitation scarcely in accordance with his usual measured and lofty bearing. "Now my last card is played out, and I must for ever awake from the deceitful dreams of my unwarranted ambition. However, any result is better than all the doubts and uncertainty by which I have been beset and tortured of late. To-morrow I will have one more day with poor Bolea, and after to-morrow's sun will, I trust, find me already some way advanced on the Andalusian road."

This sage determination was, in the course of the evening, duly communicated to the jovial Francisco, who, after maturely recapitulating all the most sincere, arduous but abortive endeavours which he had made to obtain from either minister some actual and substantial earnest of their professed interest in his friend's prospects, at length appeared to concur in the wisdom of the newly-formed resolution. It remained distinctly understood, however, that Bolea would not be less watchful and assiduous than before, during his

companion's absence, and that he would not fail immediately to impart any more favourable intelligence. Thus only one question more remained to be discussed between our two friends,—what was to be done with the letter for Antonio Perez, which Moriz had received his dying father's injunctions to deliver in person. More than once, since their first entertainment at the Leon Alado, had Villafior described, in the most glowing terms, his anxiety to redeem the pledge he had given upon this point; but his companion had invariably returned the same answer: the fallen minister had lately been placed in the very strictest confinement, and was allowed to communicate with no one. On this occasion, Moriz having again detailed his scruples and his regrets consequent upon so long a delay, Bolea replied, in his usual tone of shrewd good humour:—

“If you want this letter to be read, either by Rodrigo Vasquez or by my patron, who are now, I believe, the two deadliest uncrowned enemies to whom Antonio Perez may

by claim, you have merely to let it come to their knowledge that you have a communication for him, which may be of service to him in his present emergency. Should you prefer, on the contrary, that he alone, and not his foes, should learn what you have to impart on your father's behalf, for Heaven's sake be ruled by me, and wait until this affair takes some less unpropitious turn."

"But are you quite sure, Francisco, that I should not be allowed to see him?"

"Perfectly convinced," was the answer. "Why, no later than yesterday, Zamora, who is one of the alguacils appointed to guard him, was up at the Despacho, and he informed me, that even they, as well as every one else, are peremptorily enjoined to hold no sort of intercourse with their prisoner."

"Then what on earth am I to do?"

"To wait, of course, until some favourable opportunity can be shaped out."

Villafior again gave his rather unwilling assent to this view of the case, and the conversation then turned upon the most profitable

manner in which the last day that the two friends were to spend together could be passed.

That day, however, was destined to be commemorated in the future life of our hero, far otherwise than by the proposed excursion to the Leon Alado.

## CHAPTER IV.

As, on the ensuing morning, Villafior was sitting in his chamber, and giving some preliminary instructions to his page respecting his forthcoming journey, the latter was suddenly called away, and soon returned with the very startling intelligence, that the Duque de Villahermosa was at the door in person, and anxious to be admitted. Deeply surprised at this announcement, Moriz moved forward to meet his unexpected and illustrious visitor, in whom he beheld a person that he could well remember having remarked, on the previous day, as a silent observer of the proceedings and of

the discussion which had taken place, in the presence of both, at the house of Don Miguel Gurrea. The Duke desired by a sign the two attendants who accompanied him to await his pleasure in the small ante-room, and then, in compliance with our hero's request, preceded him into the inner chamber.

"You are, if I mistake not, the Señor Don Moriz de Villaflor?" said the Grandee, as soon as they were alone there together; "and I must hasten to apologize to you for this intrusion, by explaining to you its motive. My name is, I presume, as yet unknown to you?"

"I should be no true son of Spain were it so," returned Moriz, now slowly recovering from the embarrassment into which this unlooked-for incident had thrown him.

"Well," resumed the Duke, smiling, "you are perhaps not aware of the peculiar circumstances which may justify me in taking great interest in your prospects and welfare. Suffice it, for the present, to say that, when instead of these grey locks I could boast of raven curls somewhat similar to those," continued

he, laying his hand upon the neck of his youthful acquaintance, "my heart was truly devoted to one as pure in mind as she was lovely in form: her name was Doña Inez de Heredia."

"My mother!" exclaimed Moriz, in great surprise.

"Ah," continued the Duke, "you probably have never heard aught before to that effect: she could scarcely have imparted anything of it to her son, though God knows there was nothing to conceal."

"I do remember, indeed," interposed Villafior, thoughtfully, "I do remember to have once learned that my mother's earlier affections were fixed upon one so great, that such love would have been reckoned the wildest presumption, were love the growth of our will; but who that first and illustrious suitor was I never suspected until now."

"And now it would be useless to dwell upon that sad recollection. Nothing but actual coercion on the part of the natural guardians of my youth could then have prevented me from

claiming my first love as the partner of my life; but she is no more, and a new generation has sprung up that can scarcely forbear to smile when they hear such as me say that I have known and shared their passions. To return however to what is more immediate, from the moment in which you entered Miguel's rooms yesterday, I was unaccountably struck by something in your look which mysteriously recalled to my mind the days that are past; and when I heard your name mentioned, I understood why I had fancied that I was gazing upon the living image of the unforgotten Inez. Now, you must tell me in your turn if I am mistaken in thinking that you subsequently departed not very well satisfied with my kinsman's reception?"

"I entreat your highness to be persuaded," hastily exclaimed Villafior, "that I bore away the deepest sense of Don Miguel's kindness and condescension."

"And you equally found him," pursued the Duke, "as practical and as efficient a counsellor and guide as you could wish?"

There was something in the smile and manner of his new acquaintance so singularly reassuring and prepossessing, that Villafior, after having for a moment intently observed his countenance, could not forbear to reply :

“Your highness, who has known Don Miguel longer than I have, will easily determine, far better than I can, whether the interests of one whose sole ambition is for any description of military preferment, are likely to be much advanced by the patronage of your warm-hearted kinsman?”

“And so you reject the Señor Antonelli’s instructions and advice?”

“Alas! may it please your highness, I am utterly unworthy of them.”

“And you are bent upon rushing on an obscure death in the muddy trenches of some petty citadel, or in the confusion of some nocturnal onslaught.”

“Your highness,” replied Villafior, smiling, “is defining the very probable result, but not the professed object of my martial aspirations. However that may be, I see but little chance

of my being allowed to achieve, in his majesty's service, even so unenviable a fate."

"I trust so indeed, as long at least as I am alive to prevent it. You have already won your spurs, and you must live to wear them in a becoming sphere, until some enterprise should offer in which you could take a distinguished and prominent part. For this purpose, we must secure, without further loss of time, for you the means of acquiring the confidence and good-will of some person high in office. I think that after all, that is what you really wish for at heart. Is not it so, Señor Moriz?"

"Indeed your highness has most truly interpreted my boldest and most ardent desire; and if you would but carry your gracious condescension so far as to allow me to connect my humble fortunes with yours, you will ever find in me an honest and faithful adherent."

"Not so, amigo," replied the Duke, smiling; "I am at present a stranger to all political affairs, excepting inasmuch as the interests of my native Aragon may be concerned, and I

can give no becoming employment to the talents and energies which your father's son doubtless possesses. Perchance, however, have I just credit enough left at court to place you in connexion with some one whose friendship would be more efficient than mine, and under whose eye you could be more fittingly prepared for future eminence. This is the hour, I believe, as well as the day of the Secretary Moura's levee, and my intention in calling on you was to propose that we should go there together, and see what he can do for us. There was a time when he was not unwilling to oblige me."

It would be needless to say, how joyfully this offer was accepted by our hero, who, ere many more minutes had elapsed, was eagerly ascending, in company with his new and illustrious acquaintance, the steps of the neighbouring residence of the redoubted Don Christobal.

The appearance of the Duque de Villahermosa, seemingly a rare visitor there, created the greatest sensation among the attendants of divers ranks and sundry qualifications assembled in the minister's hall, and one of the state

ushers did not fail to proceed in all haste in advance so as to give timely warning to his master. Thus it was that when the leading member of the Aragonese nobility approached the audience chamber, he found the Secretary of State awaiting, on the very threshold, to welcome him with every demonstration of respect. As soon as the first ceremonious greetings had been exchanged, the Duke turned round to Moriz, laid his hand upon his shoulder, and said:—

“ Having now ascertained, what it much concerned me to know, that your excellency’s laborious occupations have in noways impaired your health, I will take the liberty of recommending to your especial favour a particular friend of mine, Don Moriz de Villafior.”

“ I am most happy indeed,” replied the Minister, extending his hand to our hero, “ that my sentiments should on this head, as on many others, entirely concur with those of your highness: there is no one of his age whom I am more anxious to serve than Don Moriz.”

Villafior responded to this kind assurance with a deep obeisance, and indeed so overflowing was his gratitude that he could not call to mind, without a feeling very kindred to remorse, the strong terms in which he had described and undoubtedly maligned more than once, when conversing with Bolea, the secret intentions of the minister towards him.

"Well but," resumed the Duke, "we must not forget, Don Christobal, that, at the Señor de Villafior's age, we were wont to be rather impatient of delay, and to consider every day lost as some bright prospective advantage thrown away. Do you not think that he is one whom it were sin to withhold from his majesty's service?"

"Most undeniably, Señor Duque, and I suppose that I cannot better testify the high sense that I entertain of your highness's recommendation, than by promising you for Don Moriz the very first appropriate vacancy. Can I say more?"

"Certainly not. But perhaps it might save your excellency time and trouble, if I

were to see for a moment my old friend, Asumar, who is, I doubt not, as usual at his post."

A very attentive observer of Moura's dark countenance might perchance have concluded, from its transient expression at that moment, that he would have preferred that the matter should have rested upon his former proposal. So anxious was he, however, to testify his good-will to his illustrious visitor, that he replied, with a slight convulsion of his features, which he intended no doubt for a smile—

"I see that your highness is a true Aragonese, essentially practical in matters of business. I will myself, with your permission, conduct you to Asumar; he shall show you his list of present and probable vacancies, and when I have exchanged a few words with these worthy cavaliers here, who seem determined not to leave me at peace until I have spoken to them, I will join you, and ascertain whether you have found anything that suits your views."

With these words, Don Christobal led the way through his private apartments, until

they reached a small room where the confidential secretary was engaged, with two young clerks, in sorting and distributing the innumerable papers with which his writing-table was strewn. On beholding the minister, the two supernumeraries immediately retired, after which Moura exclaimed, in a haughty and peremptory tone—

“Asumar, here is the Duque de Villahermosa, who has been so good as to come to me himself, with the view of recommending to me particularly the Señor de Villafior, whom, as you know, I am myself truly anxious to oblige. Let the Duke know what appointments are now or soon likely to become vacant, and I will hold it a duty to entreat his majesty’s assent to any arrangement which you can make in accordance with his highness’s wishes.”

“My dear Don Christobal,” resumed the Duke, apparently satisfied at length with this understanding, “do not let me be instrumental in depriving any longer your visitors there without of the light of your countenance.

Asumar and I are old allies, and will, ere your return, have devised something or other which, with your excellency's approbation, and his majesty's gracious consent, will set our importunities at rest for some time."

No sooner was the sagacious Grandee alone with the private secretary, than he led him aside, and whispered a few words in his ear, to which Asumar responded by an inclination of deep acknowledgment. The latter then, after requesting both his visitors to be seated, drew from one of his drawers a long sheet of paper, which he began very attentively to peruse. It was during this short interval of silence that Villafior first found leisure intently to scrutinize the countenance of Moura's most confidential functionary, and was still more surprised than gratified in beholding there an expression so placid and benignant that it seemed the very counterpart of that which was revealed in the rugged features of the statesman himself.

"I see here," said Asumar, "that we have two excellent military situations vacant, the one in the Rio de la Plata——"

"Oh, we cannot cross the Atlantic again, can we, Moriz?" interposed the Duke, smiling.

"Well," continued the secretary, "there is the command of a small frigate which is to cruise in the Mediterranean, the appointment to which, under his majesty's pleasure, has fallen to Don Christobal by a private arrangement."

"Oh no, nothing aquatic, for God's sake," resumed his highness, in the same tone.

"It is a remarkably fine frigate," said Asumar, gravely: "our young friend would be there in high and independent authority——"

"Come, come, amigo," exclaimed the Duke, "I know you of old to be a shrewd and skilful trader, well able to be the supercargo as well as the commander of this unrivalled frigate, and to palm your inferior merchandise first upon your purchasers as the best that ever was embarked. But remember that I am an old dealer also, and accustomed to look over every bale before I make my selection. You know as well as I do that you have something better in store for us."

"Indeed," replied the secretary, "I vow that your highness is too hard upon my goods. But as I am bound to satisfy you, I must proceed. Let me see; here is the Conde de Sierra Dorada, who is in great want of a military secretary."

"Ah, that is more to the purpose," said the Duke. "Secretary to the Governor and Captain-General of Catalonia: our young friend might go further and fare worse."

"Ay," returned Asumar, thoughtfully, "but the Conde has repeatedly applied for this very appointment in favour of his own brother-in-law, and I believe has received some promise to that effect from his excellency."

"Nothing positive, amigo, I am sure," resumed the Duke.

"I cannot exactly say. But your highness must be pleased to remember that the youth is nephew, and, at present, heir to the Duque d'Uzeda ed Almonacid."

"So much the better," retorted Villahermosa; "Francisco de Haro is one of my oldest friends, and I can write to him as well as to

the Cause, which will act the efficiently as well in both quarters. You know, Amigo, that the King does not approve of persons in responsible offices being too immediately surrounded by their dependents and relatives."

"Indeed! I was not aware of the fact, Señor Duque."

"Then you must seriously undervalue his majesty's political foresight and experience. Should a crisis occur, what certain advantage could Sierra Derrain derive from the opinion and assistance of such a mere scribbler as Luis de Haro, whilst our friend Don Martin, on the contrary, who has already been round the world and served in God knows how many campaigns, could on an emergency, take the command of the province himself. What say you, Villador, to a year or two spent in the fair city of Barcelona?"

"I shall be ruled entirely by your highness's advice."

"Inasmuch, I suppose, as suits your own views, amigo. However, in this case, I think that you will scarcely repent of your decision

when you see Elvira de Haro, or, as I should now call her, the Condesa de Sierra Dorada. I suppose, Asumar, that her beauty must have insured, for a generation at least, the allegiance of the restless Catalonians? I trust that the rude sea gales have had no evil effect upon her charms."

"They are quite unimpaired by the last accounts," said the secretary; "but I much fear that the Señor de Villafior will not see them to great advantage."

"Indeed! How so?" inquired the Duke.

"Because Doña Elvira, who is anxiously expecting her brother's appointment, will be, doubtless, somewhat displeased when she finds him replaced by a stranger."

"Oh, I am not much alarmed on that head," exclaimed the grandee. "Moriz will see that she has no cause to regret the exchange. But ere we thus cast him upon this unknown strand, we really must give him what information we can collect here with respect to its inhabitants and principal characteristics. I am sure, Asumar, that you have in your pos-

session some private chart or other, which it would be invaluable for us to consult?"

The confidential secretary cast one anxious and almost deprecating glance towards the imperturbable Duke, and then retired into a neighbouring room, carefully closing the door after him. In a very few minutes he returned, bearing in his hand a small parcel of papers, but ere he proceeded more intently to examine them, he said:—

"I take it for granted, of course, that the Señor de Villafior will entirely and for ever forget, on leaving this room, where it was that he learned any particulars that we should here reveal to him."

Both his visitors having signified their entire assent, the cautious functionary proceeded with his investigation. A few moments' silence again occurred here, after which he resumed:—

"I believe that I am now ready to answer any inquiries that your highness may think fit to propound."

"Well," replied the Duke, "let us proceed

at once to what is most practical. In former days, my old comrade in arms, Pedro de Sierra Dorada, some years my senior, I beg leave to state, was a stern and valiant soldier, ever as ready to empty his goblet as to draw his sword. I should conjecture that now he is grown a somewhat irritable and podagrical elderly personage, not very patient either of contradiction or of delay."

"It is my duty," said Asumar, "to assent to your highness's views wherever the truth does not absolutely compel me to differ from them."

"I should think that he is a good husband?"

"He possesses indeed, many of the most requisite qualities," answered the secretary in the same tone: "he is strictly faithful——"

"So I should presume."

"And particularly careful of his wife's reputation."

"Ah, ah!" said the Duke, "mind that, Señor Moriz: no serenades and no soft glances in that quarter, as you value your appointment."

"His highness might even say your life," added Asumar, not without some emphasis.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Grandee. "However, our caution will not be much needed, I should suppose: Elvira is, I imagine, a most devoted and affectionate wife?"

"I understand that she entertains for the Conde every sentiment of respect and esteem."

"Ah Dios! Asumar, that is all that we are to expect now; but let me see: when I used to know Elvira as a child in her mother's withdrawing-room, she was wont to be, for her years, I can yet remember, singularly imperious and self-willed."

"I believe, Señor, that she has fully preserved the youth of her disposition as well as that of her beauty."

"By Santiago! Señor Moriz," continued the Duke, "you will have some trouble between Doña Elvira's bodkin and the Captain General's poniard. Still, difficulties must be faced, and we have yet to ascertain what others are awaiting you. If I recollect aright, Asumar, my worthy friend Sierra Dorada was never very nimble with his pen. I suppose that Villafior will have to wield that?"

"Occasionally, perchance; but, from the first, the Conde has secured the services of one who is as competent as any person in Spain, saving of course the two Secretaries of State; to frame a despatch, a memorandum, or any description of official document. There are not many in Europe who write as well, or think as deeply as Maldonado."

"Maldonado!" said the Duke, thoughtfully. "I remember a short and rather ill-favoured personage of some similar name being sent to me last year at Saragossa, by Sierra Dorada, upon a matter of some delicacy and moment. I wonder if it were he?"

"Most probably, indeed, Señor Duque."

"Ah, ah! I well recollect having been much impressed with the shrewdness and sagacity of his views. A master mind that, I should say."

"Yes, truly, and one that will play a part, for good I trust, if life is spared to the owner."

"Is he a sure friend, Asumar?"

"He could be made so, I presume."

"Perhaps a more steadfast enemy?"

"Ah, Señor Duque, I see that it is rather I that should interrogate you as to Diego de Maldonado's qualifications. In faith, he is no child to be trifled with. I should recommend the Señor de Villafior to live on the best possible terms with all the inmates of the Capitania; but should he be constrained to show any preferences, or to form any more particular and intimate alliance, let him remember that the fiercest outburst of the rude veteran's ire, or the most impatient frown upon Doña Elvira's fair brow, are as naught to the silent scowl of Maldonado's resentment.—His revenge is a falcon that knows neither slumber nor sleep until its talons are buried in the vitals of its prey. Beware of my friend Diego, Señor Moriz,—beware of my friend Diego. I shall give you a letter for him to establish your intercourse on a good footing, and so may it rest."

"I suppose," resumed the Duke. "that, such as you describe him, he has no small occult influence in Barcelona?"

"Ay, indeed, Señor Duque, and all the

...like the unseen elec  
ever imparting its own properties to  
breath of the atmosphere which it perva

The conversation was here not very  
tunely interrupted by the return of Don  
tobal de Moura, whom the Duque de  
hermosa immediately drew aside, in  
Asumar at the same time by a sign to app  
The three conversed intently together  
few moments, after which the minister, m  
forward towards the corner of the room  
our hero had discreetly retired, thus add  
him:—

“I shall deem it my duty to submit  
evening to his majesty's pleasure your  
pointment as military secretary and  
equerry to the Governor and Captain Ge  
of the Principality of Catalonia. I sh

manner that will not unbeseem the exalted patronage to which you are indebted for so signal a mark of the royal favour."

Villafior having here expressed, in the best terms that he could command, his deep gratitude and entire devotedness, the Secretary of State resumed:—

"I will to-night, or, at latest, to-morrow morning, give official information to the Señor Duque de Villahermosa of his majesty's final decision, and should it, as I trust, be favourable, you would do well to take possession of your new post as soon as convenient."

The Duke and his youthful companion were now on the point of withdrawing; but ere they had reached the door, the minister called to the retiring Grandee, saying:—

"Since I am so fortunate this morning, as to have your highness under my roof, I think I must consult you with respect to my latest intelligence from Aragon, which, I grieve to say, has caused his majesty some displeasure."

The Duke having signified his assent, recommended Villafior to retire at once, and to

call upon him on the ensuing morning. He then followed the Secretary of State into his more private room, where the two eminent personages remained for some time longer in deep and earnest conversation. As to what occurred between them, it would not be very discreet, nor indeed, we may add, very relevant to inquire at present. Suffice it to say, that they parted with every profession of the most cordial esteem and good-will, and that on that very night, Villahermosa, ere he retired to rest, received a letter enclosing his majesty's approbation of Villafior's appointment, conveyed in terms most gracious and flattering to his patron. The very next paper referring to his highness, upon which Moura was destined to claim and to receive the royal assent, was the ill-fated duke's own death warrant; but we must not anticipate.

## CHAPTER V.

IN the meanwhile, the joyous Villafior, happily all unconscious of the future, had returned to his lodgings in a state of the most rapturous excitement. Indeed, his delight at this most unexpected and most auspicious change in his prospects could only be compared to his ecstasies of admiration and gratitude for the exalted promoters of his now brilliant fortunes. It is a common characteristic of youth, to regard with inordinate enthusiasm the acquirements to which it has not yet attained; and when Bolea returned home from the Despacho, at the

earliest possible hour, already booted and spurred for the promised expedition to the Leon Alado, he was constrained to listen to a very profuse eulogium of the marvellous self-possession, and high breeding, and penetration, and sagacity of the Duque de Villahermosa, of the Señor Asumar, and of the Secretary Moura himself, ere he could arrive at any clear comprehension of the actual result of the extraordinary good-will that they had manifested towards his friend. When, however, he was informed what that result was likely to prove, he did not hesitate to offer his most cordial and most unreserved congratulations.

“By Santa Maria del Carmen!” exclaimed he, “that is what I do call a good morning’s work. If I had had to select for you one among all the blessed appointments which lie treasured in the respective Portacartas of each member of the Royal Council, I should have lit upon that identical one. No public responsibilities to be borne; no personal decisions to be formed; a reasonable share insured

of the homage which everywhere attends upon the great, and yet no part whatsoever in the malignity and hatred which dogs their footsteps, like the dismal shadow of their glory. Add to all this, a fair portion of authority and patronage, very little labour, a commodious apartment, a permanent station at a particularly well ordered table, and all must admit that the Duque de Villahermosa is a guardian angel in the disguise of a grey-bearded and rather rheumatic Grandee. Why, Moriz, I would dance a bolero with you in his honour, were not the Leon Alado shaking his tawny wings with impatience at our delay. Come, amigo, our steeds are awaiting us without, and we have many a pledge to bear to the health and prosperity of all our illustrious patrons."

That this testimony of devotion and respect was fully and freely paid to the Duke, and to the minister, and to his private secretary, and to the Conde de Sierra Dorado, and to Maldonado himself, and above all, to the lovely Doña Elvira, we can have

very little doubt; for the grey dawn was beginning gently to illumine the eastern sky, when our returning friends again alighted from their horses at the door of their residence. Our hero's slumbers were not the less sound and soft, we have every reason to conjecture, as the morning was far advanced ere he had sufficiently aroused himself to remember that he was shortly expected by his noble protector.

While attending, as it may be imagined, with unusual care to the intricate duties of his toilette, Villafior was still deeply absorbed in joyful and eager speculation upon the brilliant future, when suddenly the day dreams of his high soaring expectations were crossed and dispelled as it were by the deadly throe of the night-mare.

"Gracious heaven!" exclaimed he, "I had quite forgotten the letter for Antonio Perez: what in the name of mercy can I do with it now?"

The more he reflected upon this unwelcome recollection, the more he steeled his mind

against the craven notion of any compromise with what still seemed to him his absolute and bounden duty; and he finally concluded that there was no better alternative for him than to confide the whole matter unreservedly to the Duque de Villahermosa himself.

When, in due course of time, he reached the hereditary residence of that illustrious line, he was forthwith, and with every testimony of respect, admitted as one whose visit was expected, and the kind welcome which he received from his amiable patron surpassed all his anticipations. His highness immediately apprized him of his now official nomination, and did not fail, with his usual penetration, to perceive that, profuse as were the youthful soldier's expressions, both of gratitude and of satisfaction, still some sinister cloud had cast its gloom over the sunshine of his happiness. As we have already seen, Villafior required small inducement to reveal the secret cause of his anxiety, and, in a very few minutes, the Duke was in possession of every particular. He entered with much good-nature and good feel-

ing into all his young friend's views and sentiments upon this delicate matter, but he appeared so much impressed with its gravity, that, declining to give any present opinion, he invited him to return in the course of the afternoon, when he would himself have had leisure to reflect more maturely upon it.

In accordance with this advice, our hero again presented himself, about the appointed time, at the ducal palace, when he had the extreme gratification of hearing the Grandee himself exclaim:—

“I think, amigo, that we shall manage the business of that letter to Perez. I have obtained permission that you should be admitted to him, for that purpose, but for that purpose only.”

“I am to deliver it into his own hands, I trust?” inquired Moriz, hastily.

“Oh, unquestionably; that has been distinctly specified. Here is an order, which will insure your admittance at any hour before night-fall, into the prison chamber. But soft, you are a stranger to Madrid and to the Court;

I do not much like to see you treading, at your age and without some sort of guide, upon the smouldering lava of this unknown soil. Have you any friend or companion with rather more experience than yourself?"

Villaflor immediately mentioned Bolea's name and position.

"He is a true Aragonese by birth," resumed the Grandee; "and, though I am not acquainted with him, I should fully advise you to induce him to accompany you in this rather perilous expedition. You have no conception of the contents of this letter?"

"None whatsoever."

"Then be careful merely to deliver it as the fulfilment of a filial duty; to say nothing at all on your own account; and, should any questions be addressed to you, by no means to answer them without referring to your friend Bolea."

"But is your highness sure that he will be admitted with me?"

"I have provided for the case, as you will see by that order, which is for two persons: I

should myself have procured some companion for you, had not you yourself pointed out one in every respect so eligible."

Villaflor, being now conscious that he had rather imprudently introduced Bolea's name, would gladly here have claimed the services of the person to whom the Duke was referring, but as he was well aware that he had already very largely trespassed upon his patron's kindness, he could not muster sufficient courage to frame this additional request.

"So much for that matter," resumed the Duke immediately, "and remember that, the very least you say about it, the better for all parties. Poor Antonio Perez! I have known the time when we were not so diffident in approaching him, and when I should have been less startled to hear that my own head was one day to be laid upon the scaffold than that his should rest on the scarcely softer pillow of a state dungeon. But such is life, as you have still to learn, *mi querido*—how short, and yet how full of every species of vicissitude! You are somewhat of a sailor, Moriz, and when

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gazing at times, from the motionless deck, upon the crystal surface of the calm untroubled Ocean, as it reflected naught but the azure of the cloudless sky, you have perchance wondered whence could arise the breeze which was to ruffle its surface, or the wild tormenta which would dash its gentle ripples into mountains of foaming spray. But while you were wrapt in silent contemplation of the glowing stillness which enshrouded you, there were those around you whose experienced and restless eye were ever seeking, in each successive sign of the heavens as of the deep, the first slight portent of the coming and inevitable storm. You are about to embark upon another sea, Moriz, with greater responsibilities than you ever bore on the Atlantic; trust not the inviting treachery of its glassy waves, and ever remember that the gale which can arouse their utmost fury, may at each hour be unloosed upon you from any quarter of the horizon. Look to your helm, and to your topsails, as closely as if you were in command of our friend Asumar's frigate. See what an

eye and what a hand poor Perez had, and where is he now ? ”

There was something in the grave and almost melancholy tones in which the Duke uttered this farewell-warning and advice, that very deeply impressed our hero, staggered as he had already been more than once by some not very dissimilar observations of his less courtly friend, Bolea. He was speedily recalled, however, to the usual frame of his ardent and sanguine mind, when his highness continued thus :—

“ To-night you will see Perez, and to-morrow, if you are wise, you will proceed at once to Barcelona and enter upon the duties of your post. Asumar has promised me that the despatches which you are to bear will be ready before noon. You must not object to my sending you a couple of horses from my stables, which I think will do you good service, and my equerry will deliver to you, at the same time, my letters to Sierra Dorada, and to the Condesa. Now adieu, amigo, may God speed and bless you. Write occasionally ; and think

always of me as of one who is ever anxious to replace your lost father."

With these words, the kind-hearted Duke extended his arms to the son of his first and best loved Inez; and well did his youthful friend testify, by the tears which he sought in vain to repress, those sentiments which no effort of language could so truly have expressed.

When still under the somewhat saddening influence of this separation, Villafior reached his lodgings, he found the light-hearted Bolea already returned home, and impatiently awaiting him.

"I know, Moriz, that it is all settled," exclaimed he at once: "I have been passing half the morning with Asumar, and have brought back with me for you a whole ship-load of that valuable, but by no means scarce commodity—good advice. We must, however, proceed systematically. In the first place, you are to call to-morrow, at about noon, on the aforesaid Asumar, who will give you the official Viatico, in the shape of a parcel of

despatches, and three hundred ducats—being your first year's salary in advance. Secondly, and that you may not forget your friend Bolea, I have provided for you some requirements which, I make no doubt, you would never have thought of yourself. See here—this little phial contains the strongest and surest antidote known at Madrid: a few drops of it would be invaluable to you, should you ever find your cheer to disagree with you, a singularly common occurrence at the table of the great. This parcel, on the other hand, encloses a shirt of mail, of surprising strength, though its hard steel is as flexible as my silken hose. I trust that neither will ever be needed, but, at all events, they are not cumbersome articles."

"My dear Francisco, I really do not know how to express my gratitude——"

"Wait a moment; you must reserve your last paroxysm until you have examined what I have yet to show. This is a treasure indeed: a whole piece of the most gorgeous and beautiful brocade that was ever detached from a

French loom. The hard-fisted Israelite, who ordered it for his manola, rather overshot the mark when he attempted to evade the regalian dues, and hence, after many vicissitudes, it has become the legitimate reward for the services of one of his majesty's most faithful and intelligent officials. See, what a texture, what colours, what a design!"

"It is truly admirable, indeed!" exclaimed Moriz: "I only fear that I shall never find sufficient assurance to wear it. Why, Francisco, when I shall appear before them in this attire, the good Catalonians will surely think that my kind patron has been restored to the viceroyalty of Aragon, and that he, for the least, has come among them——"

"Oh, you may set your scruples at rest," replied Bolea. "This noble masterpiece was never destined to decorate your lengthy limbs; we have a better and more honourable usage in store for it. I am told that your future mistress—your future sovereign I mean, of course—the disdainful Doña Elvira, is not to be a little annoyed when she sees you most

unexpectedly turn up one fine morning in lieu of her own brother, whom she loves more than any person or thing in the world, saving perhaps her most favoured jennet. Never mind that for an instant, Moriz, for frown she never so much upon you at first, no sooner will she have laid eyes upon my brocade than she will be on her knees to you, man, that she may obtain, were it only so much as would shape her a bodice. You will then judge what terms she must make to obtain the whole dress."

"I see," replied Villafior, smiling, "that I am even more indebted to you than I conceived."

"Never mind, amigo, you can keep back the thanks again until the brocade has been satisfactorily disposed of; and now, let me try and recapitulate all the information that I have endeavoured to obtain upon your future duties."

Moriz would still willingly have been an attentive listener, but the rays of the setting sun, which were beginning to penetrate the

apartment, in almost an horizontal direction, gave him full warning that he must no longer delay the unwelcome communication which he had yet to make to his friend. Summoning, therefore, his utmost courage, he fully stated to him the important service which he had been recommended to require of him. Though not unprepared to find the Duke's arrangement excite, when imparted, some disquietude of spirit, our hero was scarcely less amazed than he was distressed upon beholding the expression of actual horror and dismay which now spread over the broad features of his companion :

"By every saint in the calendar," exclaimed the terrified official, "your recklessness and folly surpass all belief! Have not I, since your return to Madrid, unremittingly laboured to impress upon your mind the awful risks which any intercourse whatsoever with Antonio Perez must now involve? If you are willing, notwithstanding my most strenuous advice, to run your own head into the noose, I have nothing further

to say; but why mine is equally to be dragged into it, I cannot conceive. I never knew the fallen Secretary, I may almost say, by sight; as for your late father himself, all that I can distinctly remember of him is a most unmannerly clout on the head which he bestowed upon me for having too closely examined your worthy mother's store of dried fruits; and now I am to imperil, and perhaps to forfeit, on their account, all that I most value on earth!"

Such, and many similar, were the reflections poured forth by the luckless Bolea, until his friend, after in vain attempting to explain to him under what circumstances he had unfortunately been betrayed into assenting to the Duke's most unexpected proposition, finally said—

"Well, for heaven's sake, set your mind at rest, and let me go alone."

As it often happens in such discussions, this absolute and unlooked-for concession produced, on the part of the good-natured Bolea, a re-action against his own somewhat excessive alarm; but ere he could devise with his com-

panion what intermediate course could be adopted, the latter was summoned away by his page with particular earnestness.

"What is it, amigo?" inquired Villafior of his attendant, as soon as they reached the ante-room together.

"An unknown cavalier, Señor, who desires to say a word with you in private."

The stranger immediately stepped forward, cautiously closed the door through which Moriz had just entered, motioned authoritatively to the page to retire, and without doffing the large sombrero which partly concealed his dark and martial countenance, whispered, in a stern but not uncourteous voice:—

"Señor de Villafior, you are presently to see the Señor Antonio Perez."

Our youthful hero started back in deep amazement, for everything which had fallen from the Duke had led him to conceive that the utmost secrecy had been observed with respect to this ill-omened visit.

"You are to be accompanied, I conjecture," continued the stranger, "by the Señor Fran-

cisco de Bolea. Nay, no admission is required: my information is unquestionable. I also know your motives, which are truly praiseworthy and honourable, for surely your deceased father had no better friend than the fallen Secretary?"

Moriz inclined his head in token of assent.

"You will thus, I must suppose," resumed the new comer, "be not unwilling to render him an essential service, should you be enabled to do so without any sort of risk or inconvenience to yourself?"

"Well, to be quite fair with you, Senor," replied Villafior, with something of his newly acquired caution, "I must be pretty well assured of the latter condition, before I overstep, for his sake, more than I have already done as yet, the bounds of natural prudence and foresight. Pray state, however, in what this service will consist?"

"You are to deliver to the late Secretary a letter from your father, with respect to the contents of which you are to be held ignorant and wholly irresponsible. Now, all that I require is, to add myself a few short lines to that letter,

or, should you prefer it, to enclose in it a small note, which I can easily write here. You possess, Señor, doubtless, your father's signet, which can be used if the present seal were injured in the attempt."

Villafior was about to urge in reply his very strong objections to any similar proposal, when he observed the door from the inner room suddenly to open, and Bolea's honest visage breaking in upon their privacy. The expression of mere ordinary curiosity which the escribiente's features revealed was soon succeeded by one of extreme anxiety when he beheld, and apparently recognised, his friend's mysterious visitor. For a moment he stood back in speechless astonishment, and then, hastily moving forward, he exclaimed:—

"You will excuse my intrusion, Señor Gil de Mesa, but I find that my secret misgivings had not entirely deceived me. The Señor de Villafior is here under my care, and I must insist upon putting an immediate end to this interview."

"Not, however, before I have fully explained its object, Señor de Bolea," answered the new

comer, in a firm though rather subdued voice. "I have that to impart which it much concerns the Señor to hear."

"Then, for heaven's sake, proceed at once; or rather come with us into this next room, where we shall be more private. I would not, for a hundred ducats, that we were seen together now, and none could tell my reasons, Señor de Mesa, better than yourself."

With these words, Bolea introduced the unwelcome visitor into the inner chamber, the door of which he carefully closed and bolted after them.

"See here, Señor de Villafior," resumed the Señor de Mesa, "this letter, written by your father, to the Señor Antonio Perez, in former and happier days, will, I trust, prove a sufficient apology both for my intrusion and my request. Pray take cognizance of it also, Señor de Bolea."

Thus exhorted, the two friends approached the window, more carefully to examine the paper presented to them. Though the ink was much faded, Moriz had no difficulty in assuring himself that it was in truth a letter

from his father, written, many years since, to the fallen Minister, and conveying to him, in the strongest terms, the expression of his unbounded respect, gratitude, and devotion. The Señor de Mesa cast one glance of intense anxiety towards the two young officials as they were deciphering, with their utmost attention, the now scarcely legible characters, and then he might have been observed cautiously to seize a letter that was lying upon the table, and to make a very short inscription upon it with his pencil. Having accomplished this without detection, he, in his turn, drew near the window, and said to Villafior:—

“You see, Señor, that there is there many a pledge which would be very cheaply redeemed by the poor guerdon with which I have ventured to tax your hereditary honour and loyalty.”

The perplexed youth was on the point of replying, when Bolea, hastily motioning to him to remain silent, exclaimed, as he returned the letter:—

“Señor de Mesa, I am decidedly of opinion

that there is nothing here which could justify the Señor de Villafior in incurring any peril, or, indeed, in committing himself in any way for the cause which you yourself so nobly and so faithfully serve. All that his father has required of him he will conscientiously perform; more, no one can expect him to do in violation of other duties."

"Is that the Señor Moriz's own view of the case?" inquired Mesa, rather sarcastically.

Villafior inclined his head in token of assent.

"Then it only remains for me," resumed the stern visitor, "to apologise to him for having imagined that his father's spirit still survived in him."

With this haughty farewell, and a somewhat corresponding obeisance, the Señor de Mesa withdrew.

"Now, God be praised!" said Bolea, as soon as he was alone again with his friend, "God be praised! that we are delivered from him upon such reasonable terms. I well perceive that the Duke was right, and that you cannot be suffered to thread alone the intricacies of this unfortunate business. Come; we have

not a minute to lose now. Let us proceed at once to the prison. Nay, no compliments, Moriz; I have my motives for accompanying you now, as I had in hesitating to do so before."

"But tell me first, Francisco, who our singular visitor can be?"

"A true hero, amigo, if ever one was fashioned since the days of Regulus. The ensign Gil de Mesa has the boldest and noblest heart among the many that are continually striving to restore, at least to his liberty, him whom you are about to see. You can form some estimate of their numbers and influence by the accuracy and rapidity of the information which they acquire. What man can do for man, Gil de Mesa will accomplish for his former master; but, Moriz, the sun is set, and we must hasten away. Here, take up your letter for Perez: by Santiago! you might full as well have not left it there just now."

## CHAPTER VI.

WHEN, after a short but hasty walk, our two friends reached the Casas de Don Benito de Cisneros, where the fallen minister was then confined, their progress was arrested at the outer door by a stern official, who expressed the greatest surprise upon being informed that they claimed admittance to the prisoner. So soon, however, as he beheld the order which they produced, and which was signed by no less a personage than the Conde de Barajas, President of the Council of Castille, he proceeded to summon the Señor Zamora, chief alguacil in charge of Perez's person.

"I am glad that he is here," whispered Bolea to his friend; "I know him a little, and he is not very uncivil for a bird of his feather."

Within a very few minutes, the Señor Zamora appeared with the order in his hand, and addressing our hero, whom he seemed already to know by sight, he said:—

"Come in, Señor de Villafior, I have been for some time expecting you. What, Señor de Bolea, are you there too?" continued he, on recognising also the latter in the dusky twilight that was feebly contending with the darkness of the porch in which they were standing. "I was not aware that you were also coming."

"The order is for two, as you will perceive, Señor Zamora," replied Francisco.

"So I had remarked," resumed the alguacil, "and I am ready to accompany you both, if you are so disposed."

With this intimation, he led the way to an old and gloomy staircase, which having ascended, closely followed by our two friends, he ushered them into a long suite of small rooms, in one of which, having cautiously looked

around him, to ascertain that no fourth party was present, he said:—

“The object of the Señor Villafior’s visit is, I understand, merely to deliver a letter into the Señor Perez’s own hands. He is fully prepared, I conjecture, to see me immediately oppose and prevent any further intercourse between them than may be absolutely required for the aforesaid purpose?”

“He is,” answered Bolea.

“I have thought it more courteous to state this at once,” continued the Señor Zamora; “although,” added he, with a rather ominous smile, “any very lengthened conversation with the prisoner would be difficult in his present condition.”

“Is he not well?” inquired Bolea, rather anxiously.

“Scarcely so well as he was yesterday morning.”

“And pray, what may have occurred since?”

“What!” resumed the alguacil; “surely you must have already heard at the Despacho that we yesterday tried, and not without some success, whether the rack would not produce

its usual effect upon your late chief's memory."

"Santa Maria!" exclaimed the good-hearted Bolea, starting back in utter amazement and terror, "you cannot mean that the Señor Perez has been subjected to the torture?"

"Unquestionably," replied the unmoved Zamora; "except we can give some other name to eight distinct and successive turns of the rope."

"Eight turns of the rope, and he is still alive!"

"Alive, certainly, and I believe in no immediate danger."

Though himself taking no active part in this short dialogue, our hero had not in the meanwhile remained an unconcerned or inattentive listener. The fearful announcement itself, the cynical indifference with which it was imparted, the gloomy locality wherein it was revealed, and that showed in such direful harmony with its own dread mysteries, each and all contributed to arouse within him an unknown feeling of apprehension and of awe, that was scarcely to be abated by the sight

which awaited him, when introduced into the innermost chamber. There, on a lowly and blood-stained couch, now reclined, as pale as death itself, and to all appearance barely conscious of the melancholy existence which had as yet been spared to him, the son of the renowned Gonzalo Perez, once himself as eminent and as powerful as his father in the councils of the Spanish monarchy.

"Who is it?" inquired the prisoner in a feeble voice, when made aware that a stranger was standing at his bed-side.

"It is the Señor Don Moriz de Villafior," replied Zamora, "who has obtained permission to deliver a letter into your hands."

"I had a friend of that name once," muttered Perez, sadly, "but that was in the days when I had many."

"This one at least, Señor," answered Moriz, "preserved his unaltered feelings of respect and of affection until the final hour of his life, as that letter will doubtless show, the last he ever wrote."

The fallen minister slowly, and with a groan of deep anguish, made an effort to extend

one of his maimed arms, so as to receive the letter that, in consequence of a sign from Bolea, our hero now hastened to present. But no sooner was the friendly missive enclosed within the trembling and powerless hand, than the dark alguacil hastily exclaimed:—

“Your mission is fulfilled, Señor de Villaflores: now, I must accomplish mine,” and with these ominous words, he deliberately withdrew the letter from his prisoner’s unresisting grasp.

“Ah, caramba!” eagerly exclaimed Moriz, as indignant as he was amazed at the heartless perfidy, which thus broke the word of promise to the hope while it kept it to the ear; but the iron pressure of Bolea’s hand upon his arm forcibly reminded him that his silence was now a duty to all parties.

“You see how I am treated here,” said Perez, closing his eyes, as if to escape from the fearful visions which surrounded him; and then he might have been heard to mutter indistinctly those words, which one no less illustrious, and still more unfortunate, was to

positive orders for acting thus, Señor inquired Bolea, his own feelings overcoming his usual circumspection

“Undoubtedly,” answered the alguacil. “The Señor Presidente Vasquez is awaiting, in a neighbourly manner, to take cognizance of this letter; orders are to request that you will now accompany me into his presence.”

With these words, Zamora slowly towards the door of the prison-room, still followed by the two friends, who had endeavoured again to meet, in one glance, the wandering and averted eyes of the ill-starred Antonio Perez!

When introduced into the apartment of the Señor Vasquez de Arce was with them, they found that

he had succeeded in wringing from his victim. He coldly saluted his two unwilling visitors as they entered, and motioning to a minor official, who was in attendance upon him, to withdraw, he proceeded, without further ceremony, to open and attentively to read the letter from the late Capitan de Villafior to his former patron. When he had carefully concluded this task, he exclaimed—

“ This is a very important communication, Señor de Villafior. It purports to state, that no less a person than the Marques de Los Velez once declared, that he considered the sacrifice of the unfortunate Juan Escovedo more important for the welfare of the state than any other which could be devised, and that he was fully prepared to repeat this sentiment even were the Holy Host in his mouth. Now, the object of such a statement, made by the writer of this letter many years after the death of the Marques, can have been but to imply that one so high in the favour of our sovereign master the King was, in a measure, accessory to the foul deed which is alluded to, or that, at least, he sanctioned and approved

tioned, even beyond the Spanish without becoming veneration. I f doubtful, Zamora," continued he, "we should allow the bearer of such able matter to retire without some interrogation."

As Zamora was not much in the differing with the views of the re President, and as the party most in was himself too much overawed to o observation, the opinion last emitted Señor Rodrigo Vasquez would probabi prevailed, without the slightest conte not Bolea himself come to the rescue.

"I can assure your excellency," s anxiously, "that my friend, the Seño de Villafior, was as completely ignoran

believe?" said Vasquez, fixing for the first time upon the speaker his dark and piercing eye.

"I am so styled, may it please your excellency."

"I think that I can remember having seen you at the Despacho Universal," continued the President, somewhat relaxing in the original harshness of his manner; "and indeed to have heard you alluded to, in terms of great commendation, by my good friend, the Señor Idiaquez."

"I am, Señor, one of his most assiduous servants."

"Then, in the name of Heaven, how do we see you here upon such an errand?"

"My friend, Villafior, may it please your excellency, having but slight experience as yet of his native land, was advised not to come unaccompanied, and I thought it a duty to offer him my services."

"And you can distinctly assert, Señor de Bolea, that he was absolutely ignorant of the contents of his father's letter?"

affirmation, proceeding from you, and is a strange communication, and on I should be loath indeed to see in any hands but mine. I suppose, at all that you could answer for your frier mediate appearance before me at any time I might require it?"

"Unquestionably, Señor President no other delay than that which will be to summon him from Barcelona."

"From Barcelona?"

"Yes, may it please your excellency Don Moriz has, by his majesty's especial command, been this day appointed first civil and military secretary to the Captain-General of Catalonia."

"Indeed!" said Vasquez, unbendingly.

a few words to his friend respecting the value of his excellency's time, upon which they had already rather indiscreetly trespassed, and, with a deep obeisance, prepared to withdraw. Scarcely, however, had he reached the door, accompanied by the no less impatient Villafior, than the unwelcome sounds of a fresh summons from the President greeted his ear.

"Hark, one moment more, Señors," said he, "what have we here? Two words in pencil, and, as I should think, in another hand, inscribed on the reverse fold of the letter. Singular that I should not have seen them before! This savours marvellously of some signal or watch-word from without."

Both our friends were at no loss to express their utter surprise and ignorance; but Rodrigo Vasquez was not to be deterred from prosecuting his investigations.

"Just call back Morales, will you, Señor Zamora," continued he. "He has cunning and experience in these matters."

The pale-faced official, who had lately left the room, now re-entered, and proceeded, in compliance with an injunction from his em-

ployer, intently to scan the suspicious inscription. Having examined the paper in every possible shape and form that he could impart to it, he finally refolded it as it had been originally closed and sealed, and then said:—

“To the best of my judgment, Señor Presidente, this epigraph in pencil must have been added very lately. At all events, it is not, decidedly, in the same handwriting as the letter itself.”

“The words are, if I read them aright,” resumed Vasquez, ‘*Oramus et Vigilamus.*’”

“Implying, I should imagine,” continued Morales, “that there are those without who are unremitting in their efforts to obtain the prisoner’s release——”

“Or perhaps to abet in his escape.”

“Very probably, indeed, Señor Presidente.”

This conclusion having been thus pointed out, Vasquez again fixed his sinister glance upon Bolea, whom, from the first, he had appeared to consider as the more responsible agent of the two, and said:—

“You must admit, if our present surmise be

correct, that I am placed in a situation of no small difficulty?"

The escribiente's face had lost all its characteristic bloom, and his lips were quivering with the emotion he laboured in vain entirely to subdue; yet his presence of mind did not wholly forsake him in this emergency, and he calmly inquired if he might himself examine the ill-omened letter. Vasquez having assented, Francisco approached the lamp, which had just been placed on the table before him, and, after apparently a very careful scrutiny, exclaimed, with a smile of quiescent satisfaction:—

"I think that I can account now for the whole mystery. The words are not '*Oramus et Vigilamus*,' but '*Oremus et Vigilemus*,' which is in much more strict accordance with the Divine precept. The opinion of Señor Morales, if I rightly understand it, goes far in confirmation of my own impression. He deems, I believe, that after this letter was closed and sealed, the upper fold of the reverse must have been slightly raised that these words might be inscribed under it?"

"Precisely," said Morales.

"Now Don Moriz's father," continued Bolea, fast recovering the whole of his usual self-possession, "died, as I have been informed, in a state of the most exemplary, and I should almost say ecstatic devotion. I therefore conjecture that, after having written his letter to the Señor Perez, I should imagine in a rather worldly spirit, he thought it but consonant with the awful situation in which he himself, and, indeed, in which both were placed, to recall, to him whom he addressed, the two most important of our christian duties. That such a warning was somewhat needed, I myself have very little doubt, though I should be loath indeed to say aught in further disparagement of one already so utterly fallen."

Whether such an explanation would have appeared perfectly demonstrative, had the circumstances of the case been different, we will not take upon ourselves to decide. As it was, however, the dark-browed courtier, feeling, doubtless, small inclination to involve in any proceedings two persons evidently somewhat high in official favour, or to fix upon them any suspicions which might be disposed of else-

where, showed himself more anxious to bear out than to impugn Bolea's suggestion.

"Were you present, Señor de Villafior," said he, "when your father wrote this letter, and when he closed it?"

"I was not, Señor Presidente."

"But you know when it was written?"

"The very day upon which the last Holy Sacrament was administered to him, Señor Presidente, he confided that letter to me, demanding and receiving my solemn promise that I would deliver it into no other hands than those of the Señor Perez. More, I never knew, and cannot say, saving that I believe it to have been written during the previous week."

"And it has been in no one's keeping but your own, since then?"

"Most certainly not, Señor Presidente; indeed, I may affirm that no person can have so much as beheld it, with the exception, perhaps, of my friend Don Francisco de Bolea."

"Señor Zamora," continued Rodrigo Vasquez, "if my orders were punctually executed, your prisoner can no more have read this inscription than the letter itself."

"Your excellency may rest assured, that he had not time to discern one single letter of either."

"Such being the case, Señors," resumed the President, after a short pause, "I will no further detain you now. I can think the matter over at leisure, and let you know should any fresh communication between us be required."

No sooner were these welcome words uttered, though still in a rather dubious tone, than our two friends retired with the slowest step and the gravest air that they could command, closely escorted to the outer door of the prison by the Señor Zamora; but when once they reached the street, their anxiety to be as far removed as possible from the dreaded precincts overcoming every other feeling, they hastened on with all the precipitation that the darkening shades of the nightfall would allow. Not a word was exchanged between them, until they had actually reached their own door, where the breathless Bolea was at length constrained to pause.

"Ah, Santa Maria! Moriz," exclaimed he,

"what a pleasant evening we have passed for our last. I should think that even your ardour for political adventure must be somewhat damped by what we have beheld?"

"It was indeed, Francisco, an awful sight. A Minister of State to have been thus tortured!"

"Well, there is one consolation for him, at all events, Moriz; he would probably be in the same predicament now, or very nearly, had he not understood that the necessities of the state required the sacrifice of Escovedo at the time that it was accomplished. What think you of the ingenuity of our friend Gil de Mesa? Is not his hand a light one still, though it can wield a gallant sword?"

"How mean you, Bolea?" said Villafior, much perplexed.

"What I mean? Surely, that his word of hope and consolation to his fallen master was pretty smartly added to that letter of yours, during those very few minutes, or rather seconds, that our eyes were averted."

"Gracious Heaven! Francisco," exclaimed his friend, in the deepest amazement; "can

it be so, indeed? Would you believe that I had really taken your explanation to the President as the true and correct one?"

"That is more than he thought, you may rely upon it, Moriz; but, happily, it did not suit his purpose to follow up the matter any further against us. It certainly is fortunate, however," continued the escribiente, with his usual merry laugh, "that I was there to pull you through the quicksands, otherwise, I verily think, that you would be by this time floundering in them beyond any power of extrication."

Villaflor was absolutely at a loss for expressions to convey both the gratitude and the admiration that he felt for the most timely presence of mind which his friend had displayed; but the latter, who was at no time a great lover of compliments, could now attend to nothing saving the preparations for a well-ordained supper, the expectation of which had not a little contributed to support him during his late trials.

We have much satisfaction in stating, that the entertainment, when it appeared, fully

responded to his anticipations, and also in assuring you, gentle reader, that the remainder of the evening was spent by him in imparting to his youthful companion all the information that he had obtained, during the day, respecting the duties that awaited the youthful secretary at Barcelona. These directions were the more needful, that on the following morning, at a very early hour, Villafior received, through a supernumerary of the Secretary Moura's department, an intimation that the Señor Asumar, being prevented from seeing him as appointed, desired him to proceed at once to his post, without waiting until they could meet. As the same beardless official delivered with this message the promised despatches, together with the welcome accompaniment already announced by Bolea, our hero lost no time in heartily embracing the latter kind friend, and bidding farewell to his hospitable roof.

## CHAPTER VII.

THE Señor de Villafior's journey from Madrid to Barcelona was accomplished speedily as was consistent with the want of the noble steeds which the Duque de Medinaceli had not failed to send to him. Within as short a space of time as could fairly have been allotted, he found himself before the massive portals of the Captain General's palace. Admittance had been immediately obtained in the

Ere a very few minutes had elapsed, our hero's solitary reflections were interrupted by the entrance of a personage, short in stature, meek, humble, and almost subservient in demeanour, who, in a subdued voice and courteous tone, addressed him, and inquired whether he were the bearer of the despatches from the court? Moriz having replied in the affirmative, he was desired to deliver the letters.

"I crave your pardon, Señor," said he, with some diffidence, "but my orders are to place them in his excellency's own hands."

"Oh, very well," answered his new acquaintance: "I will just ascertain the Captain General's pleasure, and return to you forthwith."

He accordingly soon re-appeared, and intimated to Villafior that the Governor would receive him at once.

When introduced into the stately apartment, now thrown open before him, the youthful equerry beheld an aged cavalier, whose lofty and martial bearing clearly denoted the warlike Conde de Sierra Dorada. The grey-

haired veteran was sitting in a deep and old-fashioned chair, which was partially pushed aside from the large writing-table before him, and on one of the huge arms of which leaned, or rather reclined, a female figure, so graceful and prepossessing, that small doubts could arise also as to her identity. So soon as our traveller entered, she slightly raised upon her brow the richly laced riding-hat which gently overshadowed, though it did not conceal, her lovely features and flowing fair locks; and after having cast one glance of her deep and haughty blue eye full upon his countenance, she continued, as soon as his own hasty look was averted, to scan assiduously and to her heart's content, his appearance and apparel.

"You have despatches for me, I understand," said the Conde. "No bad news, I trust: His Majesty and the Señor Moura are well?"

"I believe that your excellency will find no sinister accounts in what I bear," replied Moriz, delivering the letters with a respectful obeisance.

The Governor proceeded at once to open and inspect them, with the air of one to whom such occupation was ever somewhat irksome; soon laying aside, after a short scrutiny, the more official papers, but perusing with great attention those which were privately addressed to him.

"Nothing unpleasant, I hope?" whispered his fairy companion in his ear, as she observed him to knit his brow more, and still more as he read on.

"Nothing very agreeable either. Elvira," replied he, somewhat abruptly. "I am not to have your brother after all."

"How mean you?" exclaimed the Condesa, clasping her hands in utter astonishment.

"What I say, mi querida. Here is a letter from Moura himself, informing me that Villahermosa has chosen to step in and claim the appointment for some creature of his—one Mirafior or Villafior—you will see the name there."

"And it is Moura himself who writes this?"

"There is his own letter."

“Elvira, we are not alone,” interposed in a whisper.

“I don’t care who hears me,” con-  
the unpacified Condesa. “I say, that it  
outrage to yourself, an outrage to an  
outrage to every feeling which should an  
the breast of a cavalier, thus to forfeit  
word, after all that he had said and prom-

“There was no positive engagement  
querida.”

“No positive engagement! There was  
contract signed and sealed in the matter,  
haps, but was not enough uttered and im-  
to induce yourself as well as me, to  
upon Luis’s nomination as an absolute  
taint?”

“I am afraid that I have been over and

to some other situation equally beseeming his rank and attainments."

"Exactly; in Portugal, in Flanders, or somewhere which will leave me no expectation of seeing him for the next five years! I that have been preparing his apartment for the last week, in the joyful trust that he might arrive any day." And with these words, Doña Elvira rested her gentle head upon the high back of the governor's chair, to conceal her flowing tears.

"Nay, but this is too childish, in truth," said the Conde. "You must learn to bear with these disappointments, now that you are in political life."

"It is not a mere disappointment, it is an actual misfortune to me, as you well know," answered the still weeping beauty. "And to think that we are to have, instead of Luis, this detestable Mirafior, or whatever you call him; really, Señor, we are in no want of him. The Señor Maldonado could pen more despatches in a day than Moura could read in a week, and I am sure that I would rather copy some myself that we might remain as we are

Could not you write, and say that we do not require this gallant? When is he to come?"

"I really don't know; I have not exactly made out yet," answered the somewhat perplexed governor.

"Let me see, Señor; or, stay, perhaps the messenger could tell. Could you say, amigo," continued she, raising her voice, and making Villafior a sign to approach, "could you say when his excellency's new secretary is to leave Madrid?"

"I am that luckless individual, fair madam," replied Moriz, who, in deep and breathless anxiety, had well overheard the foregoing conversation.

At this unexpected intelligence, Doña Elvira started to her feet, while the Governor himself, more slowly rising, said, with a sort of frank and military courtesy:—

"Pray excuse my error, Señor; but ten years ago my sight would have enabled me to discern, from your bearing and appearance, that you were other than a mere cabinet courier. I entreat you to believe, notwithstanding the slight disappointment which we

have most unconsciously betrayed before you, that you are heartily welcome to my roof."

"I will not for a moment doubt it," answered Moriz; "but I trust that your excellency will excuse me if, after what I have just heard, I claim your kind permission to return at once to Madrid."

"By no means at all, I vow," said the sturdy veteran. "You really must make due allowance for the warmth of a sister's heart and the privileges of a woman's tongue."

"I am well aware, may it please your excellency, that fair ladies are entitled to inflict many wounds which they will not, or need not, cure; but in this case——"

"Well, in this case," interrupted the Conde, "some apology is undoubtedly required from the offending party, and you may rest assured that she is willing to make it. What say you, Elvira?"

"I am very willing to add, Señor," replied she, "that having to the best of my judgment taken the Señor de Mirafior for a state messenger——"

"Villafior, mi querida," whispered the Go-

“Say then,” resumed she, “that I have no conception that the Señor de Villafior would testify such extreme and most commendable zeal in entering upon his new duty. I could not for a moment imagine that what fell from me would ever reach his ear.”

“Well, Señor de Villafior, I suppose you will take that as a sufficient satisfaction from one who may not wear a sword to atone for her indiscretions. You have yet to do that my Elvira is but a child in disposition and looks.”

“I should have deemed as much from what I have lately beheld,” calmly replied our

“Not such a child neither,” impatiently exclaimed the Condesa, “as to brook censure or reproof from a stranger.”

“Neither could be intended by me.

Villaflor," interposed the Governor, scarcely suppressing the smile which any token of the waywardness of his youthful spouse seldom failed to excite; "you had better, in truth, beware of her, for she is a cunning fencer, though she carries no weapon. Now, see here, Elvira, there is a letter for you, from your old friend the Duque de Villahermosa, strongly recommending, I have no doubt, our new guest to your especial care and good grace."

The Condesa opened the proffered letter, scanned it over hastily with a look of supreme indifference, and then taking up her slight riding-rod, which was lying on her husband's writing table, she said:—

"You have now, Señor, business to transact for which I am not required: I will trespass no further upon your time. Come with me, Carlo carino."

This last appeal was addressed to a very small and beautiful Maltese dog, white as the driven snow, and which was supposed to understand nothing but Italian. It was not needed, however, for so well had Carlo been

broken in to all his duties, that, on the very first symptom of his mistress's intention to retire, he had left his station at her feet, and, with a slight bark, preceded her towards the door. Scarcely had they reached it together, when the Condesa, turning round, rolled into the shape of a miniature ball the Duke of Villahermosa's letter, and casting it to the other end of the room, eagerly exclaimed:—

“Fetch it, Carlo, fetch it. Bravissimo; now, bring it here carefully, for it is very precious. Bring it to me, I say, sir,—don't you hear. Ah disgraziato! you have torn it to pieces.—What on earth can I do now to remember the new equerry's name. Never mind, I am sure it is Mirafior. Is it not, Carlo?” And with this satisfactory conclusion, not uttered quite so low as to be entirely inaudible, she seized her forgiven favourite in her arms, and hastily withdrew from the room.

In the meanwhile, the Conde de Sierra Dorada, having finished the perusal of his private letters, again cast one very unwilling look upon the grim array of official papers that lay open before him, and then said:—

“I see nothing very important in these.—Here, you can read them this evening, Maldonado, and we can afterwards confer upon them.”

Maldonado!—thought our hero, as he gazed intently round the room, as if expecting to see some other personage appear than that meek and lowly individual, who, after having ushered him into the Governor's presence, had remained there ever since, a deferential, and apparently listless spectator of what had occurred. Can that indeed be the redoubted Diego de Maldonado? By Santa Maria! I could wring his neck like a chicken's, were he to attempt to cross my path.

While these unuttered reflections were thus passing, he to whom they alluded had moved, with a stealthy step, towards the Governor's table, and collected the different papers confided to his care, after which he whispered, in his usual cautious and diffident tone:—

“Your excellency will perhaps not forget that the corregidor is awaiting without, in the hopes of seeing you.”

“Not to-day, Maldonado—I really cannot;—we have had business enough as it is. Tell

him to come to-morrow, or to write if it is anything very urgent."

"He was already here yesterday, expecting your excellency's pleasure upon this matter," observed the secretary, in the same voice as before.

"Well, let him write, as I have just said: it will save his time and mine," continued the Conde, impatiently.

"Oh certainly, by all means, Señor," replied Maldonado. "It is only, I believe, respecting that last anonymous libel upon the King's government, which at all events will be noticed, I have little doubt, by the holy office, even should the political authorities overlook it——"

"Nay, but that will never do," anxiously interrupted the Conde: "we must not let them get the start of us. Here, I will go to the corregidor, and see what light he can throw upon the business. Perhaps you may as well come too, in case he should state anything that would require reporting to Madrid. But in the meanwhile, we are forgetting the Señor

de Villafior, who must be fatigued after his journey. See, Maldonado, will you, that he be conducted to his apartment, and that he want for nothing there either to-day or in future. You can join me afterwards in the Condesa's inner withdrawing-room, from whence we can proceed to despatch this worthy man. As to you, Señor," continued the Conde, addressing our hero, "pray remember that you will ever best consult my wishes in considering yourself as a son of this house."

Thus kindly dismissed, Villafior followed Maldonado through several stately chambers, until they reached an ante-room, where the usher, whom he had previously seen, was sitting in company with two other officials of about his own rank, one of whom was the master of the household. This personage, after having exchanged a few words with the private secretary, led the way to a distant but commodious and very well appointed apartment, where the chief equerry was duly installed. The major-domo then retired, with an intimation that he would immediately order

some refreshments to be sent up, and desire the attendance of the Señor's page.

Our hero, finding himself thus alone with Maldonado, who had as yet followed him in silence, took this opportunity of delivering to him the Señor Asumar's letter, suggesting that its probable object was to insure their speedy acquaintance and good companionship.

"Be satisfied, Senor de Villafior, that no such recommendation is needed," said Maldonado; "I will neglect nothing that may promote at once the union, and I would willingly say the friendship which should exist between us. Pray consider me here as being entirely, and most cordially at your service. I must leave you now, as the Captain-General is expecting me, but we shall meet again this evening. In the meanwhile, you must want some repose, and as their excellencies never sup until three hours at least after sunset, you will have full time for rest and refreshment."

As Moriz's reflections upon his present prospects and position were not of the most cheerful nature, and as the weariness which he felt from his rapid journey contributed not a

little to oppress still more his dejected spirits, he was wise enough to follow this excellent advice, and to seek, in the sleep which he much required, the benefit and comfort which it so usually imparts at his age. He was thus enabled, as the hour for the evening repast drew near, to appear before his chief with a more untroubled brow, and with such improvements in his toilette and appearance, as would certainly render impossible the voluntary recurrence of that error which had been attended at first with such unpleasant consequences.

## CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN shown into the spacious sitting-room where their small circle was to assemble, he found Maldonado already there, conversing with a young lady, whose languishing dark eyes and raven locks well revealed her pure Castilian blood. Who she was, our hero might have long remained at a loss to guess, if Don Diego had not immediately stepped forward and said:—

“ Draw near, Señor de Villafior, and present your homage to Doña Sirena, the fascinating niece of our common master. Perhaps you were not aware that our happy firmament

is endowed with two stars of equal but unrivalled brilliancy."

Doña Sirena cast one soft look, which certainly was not of disapprobation, towards the new comer, and then inquired, in the most affable tone, whether he experienced any fatigue from his journey. Much pleased with the native courtesy and good grace of this welcome, Villafior eagerly joined in the light and animated conversation which his entrance had for a moment interrupted, and very speedily found himself on the most satisfactory terms with both his more recent acquaintances. Many minutes, however, did not elapse before the Conde entered, in company with his wayward spouse, whose beauty was nowise impaired by the change of her costume.

"I am heartily glad to see you, Señor de Villafior," exclaimed the veteran, extending at the same time his large and rugged hand. "I trust that you are as much refreshed as would seem by your looks, and that you have forgiven us our involuntary breach of hospitality this morning. Alma del Cid! we shall make no such mistakes now: if these are the

last fashions of the court, our young gallants might have well conquered England last year, were it but to pay for their doublets and chains. Strange, to be sure, how the wheel of taste does revolve! I can remember having worn myself such loops and braidings as these when I and your poor father, Sirena, commanded each his troop on the well-earned field of St. Quentin."

"Oh! but," interposed Doña Elvira, "this bravery is nothing to what the Señor has in store to bewilder and to overcome our poor provincial senses."

"And pray what can you know of that, querida?" demanded the Governor.

"Rest assured, that my information is excellent, Señor," resumed she. "My Aragonese tirewoman, Pepita, who was born and brought up, as you know, in the household of the Duque de Villahermosa, could not resist, it would appear, inquiring after his health and welfare from the Señor de Villafior's page, for which, I entreat you to believe, that I most heartily reprimanded her. It was she who told Doña Mencia, who afterwards reported

it to me—that having thus assisted at the opening of one of the Señor's valises, she there beheld a dress of gold brocade, such as his majesty alone could ever have worn, and that on his marriage-day only."

"Indeed, madam," answered Moriz, in no ways displeased at this unexpected introduction of a subject which he might himself have felt some diffidence in bringing forward, "the Señora Pepita cannot have seen a dress of that description, but merely a piece which might be converted into one, and which I had been induced to bring with me as the latest specimen of French ingenuity and skill."

"Pray let us see it, too, Señor," exclaimed Sirena, eagerly fixing her eyes upon our hero, with an expression of resistless entreaty.

Villafior would have answered forthwith in the affirmative, but, at the very same moment, the doors of the neighbouring chamber having been thrown open, the Conde said:

"Our evening repast is ready, Sirena, and we had better defer, until we return hither, this examination, which, I make no doubt, will prove rather a long one, when once you

ladies undertake it. You are expecting no one, are you, Elvira?"

"None whomsoever, Señor."

"Then, adelante niños, for old soldiers like regular hours."

During the supper, Villafior, who was a youth of few words, and felt as yet, besides, particularly reserved with strangers, took no very active share in the general proceedings, and thus had a most favourable opportunity for prosecuting his investigations respecting the dispositions and the mutual relations of those with whom his lot was for the present cast. Two of these remained scarcely less silent than himself; the one being the Governor, whose few and laconic observations were confined to criticisms or commendations upon the performance of the cooks or the confectioners; the other, Doña Sirena, whose wandering and pensive glance betokened very small interest either in such material details, or in the more refined, but rather literary disquisitions which formed the prominent theme of the Condesa's conversation with Maldonado. From the first it was clear to

Moriz that Doña Elvira's naturally quick and gifted mind had been cultivated by the most assiduous tuition, and that, like not a few of the high born ladies of her time, she possessed, among many attainments, a very intimate knowledge of the learned languages, and some elementary notions of the leading sciences. Yet so light, fluent, and ever varying was her brilliant discourse, that none could there have detected the slightest shade of pedantry, even in those moments when the childish levity of her usual deportment was most completely cast aside. As to the Señor Maldonado, though he was always studious of maintaining every outward semblance of the utmost deference and respect towards those around him, a very superficial observer might have remarked, that his haughty and daring intellect showed ever as an impetuous war-horse, whose ardour he could not conceal, though he unceasingly endeavoured to restrain it. When standing by the stately Captain-General or the lovely Condesa, the consciousness of all his external disqualifications, rendered still more glaring by the contrast, seemed aptly to second, and,

indeed, to promote the lowliness of his demeanour; but when once seated at the festive board, or before the social hearth, the native powers of his soul would arise unbidden and take the lead, so soon as a human thought was exchanged or a human sentiment was uttered. Nothing could be simpler or more unpretending than the form and outward apparel of his speech; and yet few indeed could listen to the grave and thrilling tones of his deep, but well modulated voice, without being immediately aware that each word as it fell was inspired by Genius and regulated by Reflection. Thus it is not very surprising that our hero's first impression of rather contemptuous indifference for this singular personage, should fast have given way to a feeling of admiration and almost of awe, and that the friendly warning of the Señor Asumar should have very forcibly recurred to his memory. Nor, indeed, was he more slow to remark that some such mysterious influence was in truth exercised by Maldonado over each of the guests, the more so, perhaps, that the Condesa appeared ever struggling to defy it, the Governór to overcome

it, and the dark-eyed Sirena herself to escape from it.

"And so, Señora Condesa," resumed the said Don Diego, after a moment's silence, "you were much pleased, I understand, with the last performance of my friend Vega's comedy, 'El Venturoso Estratagema?'"

"More than I can say, Señor: the actors were far more at home in their parts than on the previous occasion, and did full justice to the unrivalled brilliancy of the dialogue. I wish that the author could have been there himself to witness the splendid success of his work."

"Nay, but this is scarcely friendly or charitable on your part, madam; Lope is already but too much inclined to sacrifice to his literary predilections his more important duties."

"And pray what more important duties can he be called upon to perform than those which he owes to the reputation that he has so nobly earned on our stage?"

"Why, Señora Condesa, you must surely be aware that, thanks to the patronage of the Duke of Alba, as well as to his own merits,

Vega might be entitled to occupy no despicable station in the political world."

"Allow me to ask, Señor de Maldonado, what position he could hold there which would insure him a purer and a brighter fame than that which he is daily acquiring in his present career?"

"Gracious heaven!" replied Don Diego, with a smile of playful and somewhat affected surprise, "have I in truth heard such a question, and the sentiment which it reveals, proceeding from no other than the imperious Doña Elvira herself? Am I really to believe that it is she who would for an instant compare the miserable notoriety which the emaciated poet is constrained to earn by flattering the passions of the great, or the far baser prejudices of the multitude, to the noblest and most exalted of the attributes of mankind—the exercise of power? Is it she, indeed, who would sacrifice the real and living substance for the false, tremulous, and fleeting shadow? Why, fair madam, had he listened to my advice, Vega might, if I may so speak, be

himself by this time the very patron to whom he may, perchance, to-morrow be humbly claiming the privilege of dedicating some nameless offspring of his ill-regulated mind."

"Ay, Señor, but during how many countless ages will his name be repeated and revered, if it may be invoked, not as the long forgotten patron, but as the ever glorious author of the Masterpiece?"

"A sorry consolation that, fair madam, for a life of poorly requited toil, obsequiousness, and subjection. Few and happy, indeed, in their kind, are those writers who have heard the occasional cheer of sympathy and of approbation rising above the baneful murmurings of unwearying censure and criticism; and how little of the joy which that blessed sound may have conveyed has ever returned with them to their humble home!"

"And statesmen and princes, Don Diego, do they meet with no critics, no censors, no rebels?"

"Unquestionably they do, madam; but remember that they have Segovia always ready for the former, and as to the latter, it is mar-

vellous how expert a modern carpenter is in erecting a gibbet or a scaffold."

"Ah, Señor de Maldonado, I recognise you there," retorted the smiling Condesa; "you prefer political eminence, not for the glory which it imparts, but on account of the powers of vengeance which it bestows. Nay, you need not exclaim, I am aware that you have betrayed yourself; but you have taught little to those, who, knowing you, also know that authority, with all its sterner attributes, appears to you the only legitimate object for manly ambition."

"Not the only object, madam, but certainly the foremost."

"What is your discussion upon now?" interposed the Conde, who, during the foregoing dialogue, had been intently studying the merits of a dish which had been particularly submitted to his approval.

"I am endeavouring, Señor Conde," replied Maldonado, "to maintain, against the superior powers of Doña Elvira's intellect, a point with regard to which I think I may rely upon your excellency's concurrence, namely, my decided

preference for the greatness of Augustus as compared to the fame of Virgil."

"Augustus?" said the Captain-General. "If I rightly remember the little I ever knew about him or his history, he was after all but a craven soldier."

"Most true, Señor Conde, and most accurately described; but yet, he was the master of the world."

"Still the true hero for me," exclaimed Doña Elvira, "is not he who won the Roman Empire, but he who threw it away for a lady's smile."

"What say you to that sentiment, Señor de Villafior?" inquired Don Diego, courteously offering the new comer this opportunity of joining in the general conversation.

"Would that it were still unuttered," answered the ardent Villafior; "that I might claim it as my own."

"I will yield you your fair share of it, Señor, in acknowledgment of your most earnest assent," said Doña Elvira, "if you will continue to lend me your countenance now that I am about to represent to Don Diego that he

has not very fairly stated the subject of our discussion. We premised by inquiry whether the Señor de Vega's literary prospects were or were not surer and brighter than those of his political career. As it is not presumable that, had he followed up the latter with the utmost assiduity conceivable, he could ever have pretended to the sovereignty, not of the world, but merely of the Spanish dominions, I should deem that the terms of comparison for our controversy were not so much the respective greatness of Virgil and of Augustus, but rather of Virgil and of Octavius's secretary."

Almost ere the latter words had fallen from her lips, Doña Elvira was warned, by her own quick sense, yet more than by the cloud that gathered upon her antagonist's brow, that her own terms were scarcely as judiciously selected as they were perchance correct. Still, the wary Don Diego having ascertained, by one searching glance, that no invidious reflection upon his own subordinate position had been intended, resumed, with his usual caution :

" You remind me, Señora Condesa, that my affection for my friend may have led me to

over-estimate the chances of his political ferment, even when I least intended to assimilate his imaginary fortunes with those of the second Cæsar. And yet, madam, were they to lead him to no loftier station than that to which you have thus generically alluded, I have still my doubts whether he would have had fair cause to regret the contingent sacrifice of his aspirations after literary renown. Great as the rulers of mankind may be, their faculties are not more boundless than their time is unlimited. They are constrained, at every hour of the day, to share with those around them the exercise of that supreme power which they have wrested from their rivals, and who can say how far the will of their most favoured adviser may prevail in their secret counsels, or replace their action by its own. We know that whole audiences have arisen in the capital of the world when Virgil has appeared; but how far deeper was the bow of the countless clients who pressed upon the footsteps of Cæsar's confidant!"

"Without mentioning the tables of proscription, Señor de Maldonado," interposed

the smiling Condesa, "just think of all the private enemies whose names he can have inscribed there, while his reckless patron may never have dreamed of inquiring the cause."

"I vow, Señora," said Don Diego, in the same tone, "that these observations of yours will woefully mislead the Señor de Villafior, by inducing him to think too seriously of my wrath, and too slightly, perchance, of incurring your displeasure. I owe it to him, to assure him at once, that the rebel who contended against me would long survive him who had been fatally impelled to defy your authority."

"Precisely so, Señor. My just resentment would destroy at once: your far more ingenious vengeance would for ever preserve life, that it might also for ever prolong its tortures. However, now that we have learned that it was Augustus's secretary, and not the Imperial Conqueror himself, who governed the world——"

"Excuse me, fair lady, if I interrupt," exclaimed Don Diego, rather more hastily than usual; "but you can have gathered no such

induction from what I have said. Commenting upon the nature and advantages of that functionary's position, I very cursorily alluded to the secret influence which he may have exercised upon the public affairs of his time; for the greater the ruler, the more he will be inclined occasionally to advise with those in whom he has placed confidence and reliance. I well might have added that, in my estimation, the mere pleasure of associating with those who have been framed and ordained to govern mankind, and the mere reflected radiance of their glory, are an apt and bright reward to many an arduous struggle for distinction. Few can tell how posterity will judge or estimate them; but we cannot approach those who wield political influence without feeling our pulse quicken and our heart throb with the intoxicating sense of command."

"Indeed, Señor! I wonder then what the rulers themselves experience while exercising their sway?"

"Few can tell that better than yourself, fair lady; for few indeed have better known

the exalted but unwearying delight of habitual dominion."

Here the conversation was interrupted for an instant by a signal from the major-domo, upon which all the attendants retired, saving one Oriental slave, whose utter ignorance of the Spanish language rendered him a very safe listener to any more secret communication which might henceforth be exchanged in his presence. The momentary silence was then broken by the Governor himself.

"Have you heard at all, Señor de Villafior," said he, "how matters are proceeding at Madrid, with respect to the Señor Perez?"

"I can give your excellency," replied Moriz, "the latest and most authentic intelligence on that head, having myself seen the fallen minister upon the very day after that during which he was put to the torture."

"To the torture! the Señor Antonio Perez put to the torture!" exclaimed the Governor, the Condesa, and Sirena—all three uniting in one deep, and yet incredulous, expression of amazement.

"Your excellency may rest assured," re-

sumed Villafior, "that strange as my information must appear, I am reporting only what I can positively affirm."

"Then you are right after all, Maldonado," said the Conde; "and his majesty's displeasure against his former favourite was not appeased by so many years of captivity and of disgrace."

"Nor is it assuaged yet, Señor Conde," calmly replied Don Diego, who alone had not testified the slightest surprise at the startling announcement just conveyed by Villafior.

"Now, for Heaven's sake, Señor de Maldonado," exclaimed Doña Elvira, "do impart to us all you know upon this subject, which, as you are aware, interests me more than any other."

"It is rather for the Señor de Villafior, than for me, to speak, fair Señora. Having himself seen the Señor Perez, he can doubtless tell how far the murder of my old comrade, Escovedo, has been confessed by its real author."

"And you yet persist in laying that deed to his charge?"

"Unquestionably, madam; and seldom has a more odious crime been committed."

"It is singular still," continued the Condesa, "how I have heard opinions vary upon that very point. I can remember the time when a man would have been accused of treason had he expressed a doubt as to the existence of some grave reasons of State, fully justifying, and even calling for the sacrifice of Escovedo; but then, to be sure, it was presumed, erroneously of course, that the assent of a greater than Perez had been obtained for that rash act."

A cloud might here have been seen gathering upon the aged brow of the Captain General, but ere he had time to administer the intended reproof to his imprudent spouse, the subtle Maldonado advanced to her rescue.

"You will be pleased to remember, madam," said he, "that I have ever entertained the same views upon that head. I am sure that the Señor de Villafior will concur with me in thinking that the assassination of a secretary is the most heinous offence that can well be committed."

“As there is no contesting that, Maldonado,” exclaimed the Governor, with a loud laugh, “I think that we may as well proceed to the neighbouring room;” but no sooner had he reached it, than the Conde drew Villafior aside, and anxiously interrogated him respecting every particular connected with this last stage of the proceedings against Antonio Perez.

While our hero was answering these questions to the best of his abilities, a dark-haired, middle-aged cavalier, in military apparel, having the rank and title of captain of the garrison, had been introduced, and had entered into conversation with the Condesa and Doña Sirena. The latter, however, true to the ever-prevailing passion of her sex, no sooner saw Villafior disengaged, than calling him to her, she again repeated, with a matchless look of entreaty, her wish to see the piece of brocade which had been alluded to before in such glowing terms. With the Condesa’s permission, an attendant was despatched for this treasure; but the expressions of admiration which it called forth when it appeared were not as unanimous as might have been supposed.

While Maldonado, the captain of the garrison, and, above all, the fascinating Sirena gave utterance to their approbation in the strongest terms, Doña Elvira examined the texture with a supercilious smile, and then turned away, as if in absolute indifference.

This was a fresh and bitter disappointment to our luckless hero. During the whole supper time he had been joyfully estimating the satisfaction which he would both impart and experience in presenting to the haughty Condesa an offering not unworthy of her acceptance; but now, she had withdrawn her eyes from it, at the very first sight, as if it were of no more value than the woollen cloak of a Catalonian peasant! Could it be that she was really ignorant of its worth, or was this contempt affected merely as a new testimony of her disregard for the bearer? These inauspicious reflections were, however, soon interrupted by an appeal from the Conde himself.

“When are we to see the doublet itself, Senor Moriz?” said he, with a good-natured smile. “By heaven! we must let the captain

know the day, that the garrison may be under arms to witness so imposing a spectacle."

"I shall, I trust, Señor, be nothing more than a spectator myself, as I can assure your excellency that I never purposed to wear such a vesture—but merely intended humbly to offer it to one of those fairer beings for whom it was originally wrought."

"And now, Elvira," continued the Conde, "what will you give to hear who this favoured personage may be?"

"She is scarcely one whose acquaintance you would wish me to cultivate, Señor, I should deem," replied the reckless Condesa; "at least if we are to judge of the modesty of her deportment by that of her taste."

"Well, that is the severest construction that could well be devised," rejoined the Governor; "but it is for you, Señor Moriz, and not for me to vindicate your selection."

"All I can say, may it please your excellency," retorted Villafior, somewhat impatiently, "is, that I had been urged at Madrid to lay this unworthy specimen of foreign art at the feet of the Condesa herself; but, after

what I have just heard, I question whether I should even be justified in beseeching Doña Sirena to accept herself what she lately seemed to admire."

"Bravissimo! excellently well said and done," exclaimed the Governor; "nothing could be better. You have won a noble dress, Sirena, by your courtesy to our guest, and you must wear it, be it only to remind as often as possible your aunt how she has herself lost it."

"It is no loss to me in any case," retorted the Condesa; "as I certainly should not have accepted such a present from a mere stranger."

"Never mind, Sirena," said the Conde. "You must allow for a slight amount of disappointment, while you, who, I trust, have no such scruples, will best show your gratitude to the Señor de Villafior by complying with his wishes."

Notwithstanding this momentary success, the fortunes of the day were not destined to rest with our hero in his unavowed contest with his fair persecutor. While he was endeavouring to persuade the still blushing

Sirena that she over-estimated the value of his offering, he could well overhear the conversation which was proceeding, at the same time, between the captain of the garrison and Doña Elvira alone, the Governor having retired with Maldonado to a distant part of the room.

"You had heard that my brother was arrived, Señor?"

"I had indeed, madam; and knowing how anxiously you were expecting him, I had done myself the honour of waiting on you this evening with the view of offering you my most heartfelt congratulations."

"Then you can judge, Señor, how cruel was my disappointment when I learned most unexpectedly that the Señor Moura had thought fit to break his word with my husband, and to send us, instead of my poor Luis, some unknown and unheard-of favourite of his own."

"Indeed, Señora Condesa, you must have been grievously annoyed! Still, there is some hope, I trust, that we shall yet see Don Luis here."

“Little enough, that I can imagine now. The Conde has persuaded himself that he wants a chief equerry and military secretary; but the Señor Moura will surely not allow more than one person in that capacity here.”

“However, madam, Don Luis may yet come to you on a visit.”

“Alas! Señor, I must not expect that, as he will doubtless receive some other appointment; and I am, besides, under a vow not to let my sisterly affection interfere with his political or military preferment.”

What observations here ensued, Moriz could not very distinctly gather; but his rising indignation was still further excited, when he beheld the captain glancing at him, while whispering something in a lower voice to Doña Elvira, who, however, merely responded by raising her eyebrows with a hopeless and incredulous expression. Soon afterwards she rose to retire with Doña Sirena; the Governor in his turn invited the captain to his room, there to inspect a specimen of an improved arquebuse, and our hero remained alone with Maldonado.

“ Well, Señor de Villafior,” said the latter, “ how like you our fair city of Barcelona, after this short acquaintance ?”

“ Not so well, Señor, as to wish to prolong my stay here by another day,” was the hasty reply ; “ and I must request your kind intercession with the Governor positively to obtain his sanction for my immediate return to Madrid.”

“ Can it so be,” exclaimed Don Diego, in well dissembled surprise, “ that anything has occurred this evening to recall this morning’s evil inspiration ? Surely, his excellency could not say or do more to persuade you that you are heartily welcome here.”

“ No, in truth ; but reflections far different, both in their intention and in their effect, are continually proceeding from another quarter, and these I am determined no longer to brook. Excuse me, Señor de Maldonado, but what I have heard I have heard, what I have seen I have seen ; and, with the help of Heaven, it will, ere long, be in no one’s power to accuse me of usurping the position of another.”

Don Diego remained silent for a moment, as

if to assure himself that his youthful acquaintance had given a full and free course to the angry feelings which swelled his heart: he then fixed upon Moriz his deep and searching glance, and said, in a slow but singularly impressive tone:—

“My young friend, as you have been confided to my especial care, you must not be surprised if I most earnestly advise you not to throw away, in one thoughtless moment, the bright prospects which have been opened before you. Perhaps you are rather to blame yourself, in having shown to-day somewhat less indulgence for the —— peculiarities of a certain fair lady’s disposition than she is entitled, or, at all events, accustomed to claim. If you will for once be ruled by me, you will take no decided step until I have had an opportunity of convincing you that all here, without any exception, are truly desirous of living on terms of mutual amity and confidence with you.”

“All, Señor? can you answer for all?”

“When you know me more intimately, Señor Moriz,” continued Maldonado, laying

his hand upon that of Villafior, "you will learn that I never promise what I cannot perform. I have said, all; I repeat, all: and, by noon to-morrow, you shall judge yourself whether my surmise, or rather my assurance, be correct or not. Perhaps I should add," continued he with a smile, "lest you mistrust the zeal of so new-born an interest in your fate, that I have my reasons both for wishing you to stay, and for not desiring that Don Luis should come. Now, farewell, as I must join his excellency; and, remember, that I require twenty-four hours, and no more, to persuade you that I am perfectly in the right, and you perfectly in the wrong."

So deeply impressed was our hero with the manner, still more than by the words of his strange counsellor, that he determined to abide by the opinion thus strongly expressed, from the mere curiosity to ascertain whether his monitor possessed the whole influence to which he thus seemed implicitly to pretend. The result was such as to confirm most fully Maldonado's intimation of his own peculiar perspicacity, the only quality to which he openly

laid claim, his ostensible ambition being merely to have foreseen the very events which he had most contributed to bring about.

Early on the ensuing morning, Moriz was summoned to the Governor's private apartment, there to assist Don Diego in ciphering an important despatch for Madrid, and in drawing up sundry orders upon matters of detail for the troops placed under the command of the Conde de Sierra Dorada. In accordance with his implied assent to Maldonado's advice, he abstained from making the slightest allusion to his still contemplated departure, and he devoted himself to the task of learning his new duties as intently as if he were about permanently to assume them. While these labours were progressing with the utmost regularity and speed, Doña Elvira entered the room, and, with an apology to Maldonado for her intrusion, requested, in a whisper, the Conde's intervention to put an end to a dispute which had just arisen between two of the upper domestics. The veteran immediately proceeded, with characteristic eagerness, to the scene of the conflict, and his

fair spouse was about to retire in another direction, when Maldonado, following her with his usual stealthy and humble gait, entreated her attention for a moment.

Villafior could not but raise his eyes from the instruction which he was copying, and though nothing of the conversation which took place in the adjoining room could reach his ear, he could well discern, through the open door, both the gestures and the expression of either party. At first, Don Diego appeared to communicate some intelligence which evidently surprised his fair companion, whose incredulous smile soon gave way to a frown of very marked displeasure as Maldonado proceeded with his observations. Then, a slight but animated contest seemed to arise between them, as if the Condesa were peremptorily rejecting some advice urged upon her, more and still more strenuously, by the subtle secretary. Insensibly, the countenance of the latter appeared to glow with a strange and unearthly light, and there was a beam of authority and of command in his eye, before which the proud spirit opposed to him was itself constrained, first to quail,

and then to yield. Next, some compromise was doubtless proposed, discussed, and finally withdrawn, for, after a few minutes of less irritating discourse, a smile of assent, or rather of subjection, again brightened the lovely face of the graceful penitent, and she retraced her steps to the study where our hero was sitting. Maldonado immediately returned to the table which he had lately quitted, and resumed his interrupted occupation, while Doña Elvira, approaching that by which, in breathless anxiety, our hero was pretending to write, said to him, in a soft and low voice:

“Señor de Villafior, I have a word for your private ear in the next room.”

He arose, and followed her.

“Is it true that you intend leaving us to-day?” resumed she, in a tone which could not entirely dissemble the emotion of the fair speaker.

“I purpose indeed, madam, to claim his excellency’s permission to that effect.”

“And you are going because you conceive that your presence here is unwelcome to me?”

Moriz merely signified his assent by a respectful bow.

"Then allow me to say, Señor, that such an impression is absolutely unfounded, and if it has arisen anywhere, you, yourself, are wholly responsible."

"I, madam?"

"You, Señor. As for me, if, in giving way, perhaps too much, to my bitter disappointment, I have said anything which can have wounded you, or induced you to feel dissatisfied with your position, believe me, that I heartily wish it were unuttered. Well,—are you not content with my apology? It is more, I can assure you, than I promised to make."

"I am, madam, perfectly."

"Your eyes, Señor, scarcely bear witness to the testimony of your lips."

"If my eyes are the less courteous of the two, madam, perchance they admit that one single word of this your gracious and too gracious speech would have been more acceptable if it had but proceeded from your own free and untutored will."

"That last observation, Señor, does small credit to your judgment, or rather to that of your eyes, which, I believe, are figuratively

discoursing now. Surely, the sacrifice of my natural pride is far greater, if I speak, as I have just spoken, by the advice of others, and not according to the dictates of my own inclinations, which, I can assure you, I am not often in the habit of controlling."

"So I should conceive, madam, and therefore——"

"Now, Señor," interrupted the Condesa, raising her slight fore-finger with a matchless gesture of admonition, "beware how you begin the war again, for perchance, I may seduce from your cause the allies upon whom you most reckon."

"I reckon upon no allies against you, fair madam," replied Moriz, again fixing, with a far different expression than before, his dark eyes upon the countenance of his fascinating companion. "My only and humble trust is in the kindness of that spirit which will forbear to strike when it sees how deep are the wounds it can inflict."

"Then it is to be peace between us for ever, Señor de Villafior," said the Condesa, gracefully extending her hand.

"No peace to my heart, I fear, madam," returned Moriz, as bending one knee to the ground, he pressed that fairy hand to his lips.

The Condesa blushed deeply as she hastily withdrew it, but perceiving the ardent glance of Maldonado fixed full upon their proceedings, she collected herself to the utmost of her power, and exclaimed :

"See here, Don Diego, you can best judge who was to blame by what you now behold."

Need I say, gentle reader, that Moriz's last reflection was prophetic, and that, from that hour, his soul was in vain to seek the untroubled repose of its youth.

## CHAPTER IX.

WE must now forbear following up, with the same precision and detail, the more personal incidents of Moriz de Villafior's daily life in his new career. We have events to retrace of great and general interest, closely affecting the fate of millions, and destined to occupy no inconspicuous place in history's eternal page. It will henceforth, therefore, be our duty more particularly to relate those adventures of our hero, and of the persons by whom he is now surrounded, inasmuch as may be required to mark their respective connexion with the more important occurrences of their time.

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From the period of his blissful yet ill-starred reconciliation with the Condesa de Sierra Dorada, Don Moriz, wholly unconscious as yet of the far graver cares and trials that awaited him, applied himself, with the whole energy of his mind, to master and to perform the duties which he had undertaken. The zeal and the intelligence which he displayed, the knowledge and the experience which he already possessed, or speedily acquired, respecting all matters of military routine, as well as concerning the selection and management of horses, dogs, and all the complicated apparatus for the chase, as for the battle-field, soon won him, in a singular degree, the confidence and affection of his irritable but frank-hearted master. Fully satisfied upon this point, he endeavoured no less strenuously to secure the esteem and good-will of every other member of the Governor's family or household; and, generally speaking, his efforts were crowned with the best and speediest success. His warlike or tender romances, for, in common with most of the youthful cavaliers of his age, Villafior's natural taste for music had been sedulously cultivated, sel-

dom failed to draw tears from the languishing eyes of Doña Sirena. With Maldonado his intercourse was the more agreeable and unconstrained, that the ardent workings of Don Diego's ambitious soul were very much in harmony with those of his own, while the difference in their years, their actual pretensions, and their intellectual acquirements, rendered it easy for Moriz to show that deference towards his colleague which could best contribute to the harmony of their relations. As to the inferior officers and domestics, so courteous and obliging were his native manners, that, ere a month had elapsed, they one and all would have gone far to show their respect and regard for the youthful equerry. Such being the case, gentle reader, you will doubtless rest satisfied with the conviction, that he in whom you have already, I trust, taken some interest, was perfectly and supremely happy : I lament to say that such a surmise on your part would be totally without foundation.

It was not metaphorically that we said it before : in one fast fled moment, the rest of his heart had vanished. None would have been

more surprised than himself had he been informed, that, contrary to the earnest advice of his truest friends, to his own previously fixed determination, and to the sterner dictates of his conscience, the youthful Condesa already absorbed a far greater share of his secret thoughts and sentiments than was either expedient or lawful. Still, had he faithfully interrogated those innermost feelings which are in truth the pulsations of the soul, he would have ascertained that there was one at Barcelona for whose smile he would gladly have sacrificed every other object of his life. But alas! from the hour when, in the enchanting fascination of her repentance, that beaming eye had been so softly and yet so intently fixed upon his own, no further token of her interest or almost of her notice could he succeed in eliciting from her. Few were the instants of the day when he was not devising some method of attracting her attention, or of procuring for her some transient moment of satisfaction or of pleasure; and yet, though her manner was no longer harsh or uncourteous in any degree, it had again become, and would ever remain,

reserved and distant in the extreme. This could not but grieve him the more that such coldness and estrangement were little in accordance with her usual bearing to those around her; and that, which was far sadder still, they contrasted most strongly with her deportment towards one whose title to her good-will, certainly, appeared to him scarcely superior to his own.

That the singular powers of Don Diego de Maldonado's mind and the almost unrivalled brilliancy of his conversation should have gone far to captivate her sympathy and to promote the freedom of their intercourse, was not very singular. In this respect, our hero was painfully conscious of his own inferiority, and gladly would he have returned to the hated precincts of Salamanca to complete even now his neglected education, by acquiring something of that learning which shone forth so conspicuously in the animated discourse of Don Diego and of Doña Elvira herself. Still, every allowance being made for the peculiar satisfaction which one so highly gifted as the latter must naturally have felt in the society of such a congenial in-

tellect, it was scarcely possible to account, on this score alone, for the strange and mysterious influence which the subtle secretary seemed to exert in that very quarter where he might least have been expected to possess it. Though apparently ever ready to controvert his views and to contest his sophistical deductions, the youthful Condesa clearly dreaded her dark-eyed antagonist, and, incredible as it might appear, showed herself generally more anxious to propitiate him than he was to win her regard. Indeed, there was something of the fascination attributed to the snake over its prey which seemed ever attracting the beautiful Elvira within the fatal grasp of Maldonado—a power that she was unable to resist, while every faculty of her soul and every impulse of her heart were warning her of the imminence of the peril. Had he ever marked the slightest tenderness in her look or in one transient accent of her voice while she was conversing by the hour with Maldonado, Villafior would doubtless have imagined that his ill-favoured colleague had actually succeeded in awakening a sentiment which the veteran governor could

scarcely be supposed to have aroused in the gentle bosom of his spouse. But no such indication could be detected, and if the conversation occasionally lost its usual unconstrained, genial, and purely intellectual character, the expression which had so forcibly been revealed on an occasion to which we have lately alluded, an expression of anxiety amounting almost to awe, but never softening into affection, was all that the features of the Condesa would betray.

Awe for him! was it conceivable that she, the high-born, the lovely, the powerful, the pure, could entertain any such feeling for one who, great as might be his natural endowments, still depended almost for his existence upon her own husband? Surely were he to attempt to injure her, or to cross her path, how easily could one smile from her induce the Conde to consign him for ever to his native obscurity; and yet it could not be doubted that all consciousness of any similar authority, if it had ever been entertained, had long since vanished from the mind of Doña Elvira. By what extraordinary concourse of circumstances such a state of things had been brought about

not unnaturally became a very prominent subject for our hero's reflections, and insensibly absorbed them to such an extent that every other matter soon appeared to him of secondary consideration. As, however, it was hopeless to attempt solving the mystery by means of any more direct intercourse with the Condesa herself, Moriz saw no better method of prosecuting his investigations than by following them up in the more intimate society of Don Diego himself. This course seemed, from the first, the more hopeful that the latter personage, probably from very good motives of his own, showed the greatest willingness himself in associating with his young colleague. Indeed, a month had barely elapsed since Villafior's arrival, when an overture was made to him by Maldonado, guarded in its expression, but of such a nature as scarcely to be considered without some attention.

They had been despatching together, during a whole afternoon, sundry matters connected with the government of the Principality, and Moriz was expressing his gratitude to his experienced companion for having extricated

him from several minor difficulties which would more properly have fallen to his own exclusive lot, when the latter replied, with his most winning smile :

“ You can reserve your thanks for future occasions, when it may really have been in my power to render you some service.”

“ That you have already done, Maldonado, more than once.”

“ Not more than once, amigo ; but once, perhaps. Do you know that I take some little credit to myself for having prevented you from annihilating, in the very outset, all your political prospects ?”

“ You cannot take more credit than I am willing and anxious to give you on that head, not only from gratitude but from actual admiration. Would that I had your secret for swaying so potently, and yet with such facility, the decisions of the imperious Doña Elvira.”

“ Ah, ah, Señor Moriz, you would desire such power as you are pleased to attribute to me, that you might exert it for far different purposes. Perhaps you will be surprised to hear that my only influence is that of reason

and sense over caprice and folly. To revert, however, to our former subject—I told you, I believe, at the time, that I was anxious for you to stay here, both on your own account and on mine. The former reason requires no explanation; but I am surprised that you should have carried discretion so far as never yet to have investigated the latter.”

“I am not, I assure you, Maldonado, the less anxious to know it.”

“It is simply, Señor Moriz, because I am in want of a friend of your disposition and age: I take the former to be firm and determined, and the latter not very much above twenty.”

“About twenty-three, I regret to say; but pray, may I ask, how the number of my years can affect our alliance?”

“Very materially, indeed, amigo: early youth is the period of true friendship.”

“Then I am to bring into our compact, Maldonado, more than I can expect to derive from it?”

“Not so, Señor Moriz: each will be in his fair relative position for conferring the greatest

possible amount of mutual benefits. Shall I first state those which perchance I shall be enabled to render, and proceed then to point out those which I may be justified in expecting?"

"It would be more congenial to my feelings if you were to reverse that order."

"Well and chivalrously answered, Señor Moriz. You must know then that, in my estimation, no man, by the law of our nature, possesses, in the required degree, all the qualifications that can best ensure either his happiness or his true eminence. In common even with those who are far greater than I can pretend to be, I want some one who, ever by me and ever with me, may supply those deficiencies of my own which I can well feel. I am no coward, Villafior, or I should not have entered upon the life which I have traced out for myself, not in the empty regions of fancy, but in the firm and solid field of actual probability; I am no coward, and yet I cannot bear a sword nor head a troop as you can."

"Common qualifications enough those, Maldonado."

"Perhaps so, and somewhat bootless equally, if they be not turned to their utmost purpose by the agency of some superior mind. Had we one common interest, Villafior, and one common pursuit, my steadfast view and your unflinching hand might accomplish great things for us both. I know that you are ambitious; I read it in your eye ere your lips first made the avowal. You also know how kindred in that respect my spirit is to your own: were we but sincerely allied, Moriz, be assured that we should prevail."

"You have my fullest assent, Maldonado, both to the means and to the end."

"The more I reflect upon it," resumed the wily Don Diego, thoughtfully, "the more I am inclined to believe that you cannot do better than act, for the present at least, in concert with me. You have, if I am well informed, but one influential patron at court, the Duque de Villahermosa."

"How can you know that? I don't remember mentioning his name here on any occasion."

"It matters not: you will generally find me pretty correctly informed. Now, I must tell

you, that an Aragonese, however lofty may be his station, is, on the long run, but a sorry protector at the Castilian court."

"Well, but who else am I to look to?"

"Do not be much astounded if I answer: to me. I suppose you have already discovered, Señor Moriz, that the demure and respectful private secretary to the Captain General of Catalonia has some slight share in the government of that important province?"

"I have indeed," answered Villafior, with a smile.

"What if I tell you that there is not a single official in all its wide plains and in all its wealthy cities, that does not, in some degree, owe his position to him or expect his preferment from him."

"Indeed; then you can scarcely be in want of friends."

"Ah! happy twenty-three years! There is not one among them, hijo, who would so much as doff his bonnet to me to-morrow, were my reflected greatness to be withdrawn from me; ay, were it eclipsed but for an hour. I have but one true friend in the world."

"One only? That is the Governor, I suppose."

"The Governor! His friendship is for his own imbecility, which requires my services, and not for my firm and constant devotion to him."

"Who is it, then, may I ask?"

"The truest friend which a man can have. Your mistress may sell you, your wife will betray you, your brother may become your rival; both your parents and your children have the feelings of another generation. Your sister, Moriz, is your readiest counsellor, and your safest confidant. Have you any?"

"No, I regret to say that I am an only child. And you?"

"I have but one: we seldom meet now; yet we well know that neither time nor distance can estrange us. Recurring, however, to our former subject, allow me to ask you, if you did not see my friend Asumar himself ere you left Madrid?"

"I did."

"How did he seem in health?"

"Particularly well, I thought, and active."

"It matters not," muttered Maldonado, musingly; "it matters not: if he grow not tired of public life, public life may grow tired of him, and that in due time. Did it ever occur to you, Villafior, who his successor is likely to be?"

Our hero merely responded by a look, first of earnest inquiry, and then of deep amazement.

"That would not be a bad situation for a trusty friend to hold, eh, Señor Moriz? The Under-secretary of State for the internal department of the Spanish Empire might render some slight service to a faithful associate. Moura has a daring and a crafty mind, but is incapable of drawing up a state-paper, or of framing a plausible answer to the poorest libel upon his administration. He must have by him, at every hour, one who is able to expound his views, and to justify his acts. Asumar has a keen eye and a ready pen, but he lacks the sacred fire of ambition; otherwise, how often would not the King himself have admitted him into his presence, and made more direct use of his abilities. Ay,

the King himself; for, after all, what does he need, saving a firm but pliant instrument for his own designs?"

"Naught else, Don Diego, I fully believe."

"Why, then," resumed Maldonado, still pacing the apartment, as if reflecting aloud, rather than addressing his comrade—"why, I ask, when Moura is nailed to his chair by his monthly attack of rheumatism, must the Señor Idiaquez, forsooth, bring his courteous intervention to the rescue? The Under-secretary of State should be ready to meet the King himself at a moment's notice, to impart every information which Majesty might require, and execute at once every order which the Crown can devise. Who can tell what may not occur in those interviews, when such access is open to the royal ear, and such progress may be made in the royal confidence? Who was Moura, after all? and who was Granvelle? and who was Ximenes, himself, the most gifted among them? Had they toiled more than I have over the book of learning, or studied more intently the innermost recesses of the human heart? True, at my years, they were

scarcely more forward than I am in the anxious race, and for me the real period of ambition is barely reached yet. Ah! be cautious there: the fickle deity has no liking for age, as our late emperor too justly remarked. O, Fortune! Fortune! sovereign of the universe, who dost shed such lustre upon thy favourites, that mankind will fall down and worship in them the reflected radiance of thine own beauty, I have not wondered that thou shouldst so truly love youth; for youth, fair nature's first-born and best-beloved, is also thy most ardent and most daring suitor: but why wilt thou, the heaven-sprung—the free—the all-beautiful—the all-adored—so often bestow thy most priceless favours upon the lowly slave, and upon the degraded menial? Why, in thy too forgetful hours of endearment, wilt thou so recklessly fling thy glittering mantle upon the shoulders of the craven idiot, while the hero and the sage are prostrate in the dust before thy feet? Who has knelt to thee as I have? who has cast away more unsparingly than I have at thy shrine each enjoyment of life, each prejudice of conscience,

every other allegiance, every other hope? When wilt thou incline towards me thy star-crowned brow, that, clothed but for a day in the unimagined splendour of thy smile, I may teach others to feel for me all that I have felt for those whose vows thou hast not disdained to requite. Alas! fast, fast are flying the unrewarded days, and the season will soon be spent, when I may still trust that thine eye will yet rest upon me. — But I am dreaming, Señor Moriz, dreaming aloud, as those will who allow their imagination to outrun their discretion. The time may come, however, when, if you still remember our conversation, you will be less surprised at what you have this day heard.”

“I shall not be surprised, Maldonado, I assure you, after what I have witnessed here, to see you attain any object which you may contend for. Kingdoms are ruled by such as you, and he that has acquired the mastery that you have over all around you here, may well pretend to govern other minds in another sphere. What astonishes me really, is, the influence which you have obtained over Doña

Elvira. Pray tell me how long it has been so."

At this second, and very direct inquiry, Maldonado fixed upon his youthful interrogator an anxious and searching glance, and then said:—

"You are scarcely so discreet, amigo, as the laws of chivalry were wont to require, when fair ladies are concerned. The less you think upon such matters, the freer your mind will be for following up the avocations of real life."

In such manner did Don Diego contrive, on many subsequent occasions, to evade, even in their moments of greatest apparent intimacy, any questions which his companion might put to him respecting his intercourse with the Condesa; and though they often afterwards conferred together in the same strain, though Villafior was led further and further to connect his own views and plans of preferment with those of his still more ardent colleague, he could not succeed in eliciting from him any intimation upon the point which, we have already said, occupied and perplexed him most. While he

was thus baffled in all his endeavours to obtain some satisfactory explanation of the mystery, a fresh incident occurred which rendered it both more obscure, and more interesting to him than ever.

As he was one afternoon engaged in studying, within the precincts of his own apartment, a treatise upon the noble science of Vénérerie, he was suddenly informed that a courier had just arrived from Madrid, with very urgent despatches, but that the Señor Maldonado was not in the way to deliver them to the Governor. Moriz at once proceeded to perform this office; but no sooner had the Conde cast his eye upon the foremost official paper, than he exclaimed:—

“Gracious heaven! this does require immediate attention. Where on earth is Don Diego?”

“I believe, Señor Conde, that he was not in his room just now.”

“Never mind, amigo; I must see him, and that without loss of time. Pray be so good as to go yourself, and find him out, wherever he may be.”

Villaflor was withdrawing upon this errand, when the Captain-General added :—

“ Will you also, after you have discovered Maldonado, ask the Condesa to deliver to you for me the last private letter from Moura, which I showed her, as it contained something relating to her brother, and which I believe that she has never yet returned to me.”

The ultimate result of our hero's inquiries led him to conclude that he would find his colleague in Doña Elvira's private apartment; and he therefore repaired to it at once, so as to impart both his messages at the same time. He paused at the inner door, and knocked twice; but receiving no answer, while he could himself well overhear the voices from within, he finally determined to enter without further loss of time.

The sight which he then beheld, though it flitted with the rapidity of lightning before his eyes, struck him to the very heart. On her richly embroidered estrada the young Condesa was sitting, her countenance pale with terror, and her hands as well as her eyes raised in an attitude of the most anxious

supplication; while her companion, with one arm resting upon the table between them, and the other uplifted with a stern and menacing gesture, was addressing her in a rude and peremptory tone. Moriz distinctly overheard the words—"I defy you, at your peril, ever to allude to it." — But a faint shriek of alarm from the dismayed beauty warned the stern speaker, whose back was to the door, that their privacy was intruded upon.

Maldonado turned hastily round, and, perceiving Villafior, recovered himself with surprising presence of mind, while he said:—

"We could have no better judge, madam, than Don Moriz, whether or not mine is a fair parody of Gomez's acting."

"I suppose that the Señor de Villafior must have himself conceived that he was coming to a theatre," added the Condesa, with a voice in which confusion was still struggling manifestly with anger; "otherwise he would scarcely have broken into my own sitting-room with so little ceremony."

"I humbly crave your pardon, madam," replied Villafior; "but I knocked twice at

your door, and so loud that you must have heard me, had Don Diego's performance not been quite so energetic. My apology must be, that I am personally sent by the Governor to summon the Señor with all speed to his presence."

"Then, with your permission, madam, I will retire," said Don Diego, casting, as he withdrew, an earnest glance behind to assure himself that Villaflor was following him.

The latter did accompany him to the ante-room, but there, remembering his message for the Condesa, he turned hastily back, and again knocked at her door. A faint voice from within having this time desired him to enter, he found her standing in the middle of her room and endeavouring to conceal her handkerchief, which had evidently just been effacing from her eyes the tears that still dimmed their lustre.

In answer to a look of anxious inquiry, more subdued than the former, Moriz shortly stated the motive of his unexpected return.

"The Secretary Moura's last letter," said Doña Elvira, doubtingly, "I really believe

that I restored it to the Conde on the very day that he showed it me. However, I can look in my casket."

The result of this search was finally to disclose the missing letter among a motley assemblage of jewels, trinkets, and papers, which had found refuge in this gilded receptacle of the Castilian beauty's choicest treasures. She eagerly handed the missive to Villafior, but he could not retire without again apologizing for his involuntary intrusion.

"Do not mention it," said the Condesa; "it is rather I who require your forgiveness for having somewhat uncourteously, I fear, expressed my surprise. The fact was that I had my reasons to regret that you should have come at that moment."

There was something so irresistible in the plaintive tone and manner with which these few words were uttered, that Villafior's soul flew to his lips when he replied,

"Would, indeed, madam, that I had not seen what I have just witnessed!"

"What can you mean?" eagerly inquired Doña Elvira.

“ If you did see the mark of  
upon my cheek,” calmly answered  
desa, “ surely it was but a slight  
the tribute which I must occasionally  
my nature. Is it not our part to  
laugh one hour and to weep the next ? ”

“ Madam, I will say no more  
should appear indiscreet,” replied  
with a low bow, he retired as  
door.

It was clear that some very unusual  
were struggling in the bosom of  
desa; she pressed her hand to her  
as if in an agony of anxiety and  
then, moving forward towards  
addressed him :

“ Your countenance, Señor

no more. May I reckon upon your compliance with this my request?"

"You may, fair madam, upon my solemn word. Allow me, however, once for all, to assure you, that should any one, whether here or elsewhere, no matter by what arts or devices, venture to trouble for an instant the serenity of your happiness, you have, as long as I am here, one at least at your command whose mind may be untutored, but whose heart is honest, and who would consider the life of a traitor but as a very poor atonement for one tear that, in an evil hour, you had been constrained to shed."

There was a glow of youth, of honour, and of chivalrous enthusiasm in the tone as well as in the look of the speaker, which would have kindled some mutual feeling in a far sterner breast than that of the Condesa de Sierra Dorada. She had read of such sentiments thus expressed in fabled romances; she had seen the wearied actor painfully gasping and struggling to portray them upon the stage, but never as yet had the voice of manly sympathy thus spoken to the secret sorrow

which preyed upon her life. She fixed her beaming clear blue eye full upon the countenance of her self-offered champion, and then exclaimed:

"Am I to believe that this youthful but trusty sword of yours, Señor Moriz, would indeed be drawn in my quarrel; that is, had I ever a quarrel and a just one?"

"Whether just or unjust the quarrel, madam, my poor sword could own no brighter or loftier allegiance."

"Then I am also to understand that for me it would be unsheathed even against your trusty ally?"

"What ally, madam?"

"What ally, Señor! Do you think that you alone can see what is going on around you? You have, as you well know, entered here into a close partnership, for evil and for good, with one whom I need not name."

"You wrong me, I assure you, fair lady. One person, and one only at Barcelona, has shown some interest in my future fate and prospects, and with him I have consequently been led to associate more, perhaps, than with

others. I know of no further bond between us, and, should you but say the word, I would as willingly call him to account as any one else whom you might name. In truth, no later than to-day, Señora, I can, with your permission ——”

“Not so, I entreat, Señor,” hastily interrupted the Condesa, now somewhat alarmed at the alacrity of purpose thus manifested in her service; “Maldonado is by circumstances my ally still more than he is yours, and no third party can be allowed to step in between us. Indeed, I might add, strange as it may seem, that he is a more fitting counsellor and guide for me than for you. To me, he can scarcely impart aught but some slight elements of his own surprising erudition. To you, he might offer the contagion of his precepts and of his example. Beware of him, Señor Moriz, for a course somewhat similar to his own is opening before you; be not overruled by his baneful advice, for you have that within you which will ever supply the truest and the noblest inspirations that you may require to enlighten your path.”

This simple but earnest recommendation was uttered in a tone of almost affectionate interest, which, while it thrilled to our hero's heart, emboldened him again to meet the glance of the lovely speaker, as he replied :

"Your kind and too kind warning, madam, shall ever be the law of my life; still, I would gladly inquire, if I thought that you would forgive my audacity, how you can estimate so lightly yourself the perils of that society which you so considerately urge me to shun?"

"I deem that question already answered, Señor; you might be persuaded to become his comrade; why should I not point to all I dread—his accomplice? What similar danger can I have to fear?"

"Doubtless, madam; but are there not others, which, though essentially different, should be equally guarded against?"

The Condesa responded first by one matchless look of proud and almost sarcastic interrogation; she then said—

"You surely cannot mean the perils which my peace of mind might incur. Gracious heaven, Señor de Villafior! Nay, speak the

whole truth, I conjure, I command you," proceeded she, with sudden and surprising vehemence. "Maldonado and I are together each day and at all hours; did ever you, or any one around you, venture to conceive that I could find any particular pleasure in his society?"

"No, madam, far from it," anxiously interposed Moriz. "I thought the very reverse, and it was on that precise account ——"

"Well, proceed; I wish to hear all."

"Then, gracious madam, your order must be my best apology for the frankness which you command. I have marvelled at times that while Don Diego's presence certainly appeared to you rather distasteful than otherwise, he should so distinctly have assumed towards you the outward bearing of mutual sympathy and regard."

At this undisguised avowal, Doña Elvira remained silent for a moment. The perplexity which had impelled her to seek in the present conversation a relief for the endless misgivings and doubts that her imagination had conjured up from the moment when Villafior's gaze had

fallen upon her as she was quailing beneath the threatening gesture of Maldonado, that restless perplexity of a troubled mind which so frequently creates the very peril which it is attempting to dispel, was now at its height. She succeeded, however, in mastering, by one desperate effort, the emotion which she could not all conceal, and finally said:—

“ In sympathy, in friendship, in mere worldly connexion, there are numberless degrees. I have my husband’s orders for showing every consideration and regard to his most confidential and most faithful servant; I am besides a true admirer of the Señor de Maldonado’s learning and powers of conversation: no one, however, I trust, knows better than himself within what bounds I desire our intercourse to remain. If you are wise, Señor de Villafior, you will be no less circumspect than I am, and while remembering my friendly warning, you will recollect, that if it were imprudent to neglect it, it would be far more perilous still to betray its origin.”

Our hero responded by the strongest professions both of gratitude and of solemn

secrecy; and then instinctively judging that the interview had been sufficiently prolonged, he returned to the Conde's closet with the Secretary Moura's letter, which, as he had rightly conceived, had not been immediately required.

## CHAPTER X.

THE intelligence which the Conde de Sierra Dorada had received on that day was in truth of much present and of greater future importance. On the 20th of April, 1590, Antonio Perez had succeeded, with the assistance of his wife and of the intrepid Gil de Mesa, in escaping from his prison at Madrid, and while this fact was notified by Moura to the Captain General, orders were sent to him in the King's name to secure, by all means in his power, the person of the fugitive, in case he were to set foot within the principality of Catalonia. During the whole evening, instructions to the foregoing effect were delivered or despatched

to all the competent authorities of the province, and when, after supper-time, the subject could freely be discussed in the Governor's restricted family circle, every circumstance connected with it naturally became the leading topic of conversation. As usual, the Secretary of State's despatch had been laconic and guarded; but, as usual also, Maldonado's private correspondence had put him in full possession of all the most interesting particulars.

"And so it was Doña Juana, after all, who had contrived the happy stratagem," exclaimed the Condesa. "She is a noble creature, and as to the Señor Gil de Mesa, he is worthy to wear the coronet of a marquess."

"He, at all events, showed some presence of mind in this case," resumed Don Diego. "I am told that scarcely had he issued from the prison with his patron than they were met by the city guard; but my friend Gil conversed so freely with them, in his usual unconcerned style, that they actually escorted him and his companion on a portion of their way to the gates of the city without conceiving the slightest suspicion."

"I hope that they will not come in this direction," resumed Doña Elvira, "for I am sadly afraid that the Conde would have them arrested."

"That I would, you may depend upon it, and they also," briefly observed the veteran; "and to be frank with you, Elvira, I am rather surprised, and not very much pleased to perceive the unaccountable interest which you seem to take in this culprit, who is now a self-avowed murderer."

"The Condesa must feel some indulgence for an offence which she herself commits at all hours," said the captain of the garrison, who had been summoned late in the afternoon to take his share in the requisite arrangements.

"I cannot be responsible for those who seek their own doom," replied Doña Elvira, scarcely suppressing a smile at the not very novel compliment of the gallant soldier. "To return to the Señor Perez, however, I distinctly say that, were I alone here to express or to entertain such a feeling, I do trust that he may succeed in quitting Spain with safety."

"You are not alone here in such a senti-

ment, madam," said Villafior. "The Señor Perez was my father's friend and benefactor, and I would gladly believe also that his sorrows and troubles are now at an end."

"Why, this is treason indeed," exclaimed Maldonado with a smile;—"it will soon become a serious question with his excellency whether its authors should not be, as a preliminary step, arrested and placed at his majesty's disposal."

"Would that I could see the King upon the matter,"—earnestly continued the Condesa; "I should kneel at his feet and intreat him, for the sake of his own peace, honour, and bright renown, to follow up this unfortunate business no further. I, too, have my letters from Madrid, Senor de Maldonado, and they have informed me of the very painful impression produced by the recent proceedings, even at his majesty's own court."

"And would you equally urge this advice upon the crown, Villafior?" asked Don Diego, who always seemed particularly anxious both to hear and to note anything imprudent which

might fall from others, however friendly his intercourse might be with them for the time.

"I most certainly should,"—calmly replied our hero; "and sad it is for kings, I deem, that they have so few around them who will ever tell them what it most concerns them to know."

There was something so earnest and genuine in the opinions thus expressed by the two youngest members present, that both the captain of the garrison and the stern Conde himself seemed for a moment staggered in their headlong zeal for the discharge of the Secretary Moura's orders. Indeed, it was scarcely possible to reflect upon the fate of the very personage who was the original subject of their conversation, without some misgivings as to whether implicit obedience to every impulse of the sovereign's will and caprice was the surest means of long retaining either public consideration or the royal favour itself. The ever attentive Maldonado well observed these rising doubts and scruples, ere, slowly addressing the Condesa, he said—

"You speak, madam, from the free and

generous heart which nature has given you; but, alas! mankind must be reformed and transformed before such feelings as those can rule its destinies or restrain its eternally unfailing propensity to evil. Kings have doubtless their courtiers and their flatterers; but they will find a no less noxious race ever at their side—those, I mean, who, startled and panic-stricken by each breath of popular discontent and criticism, would, at every hour, deter authority from vindicating its rights or accomplishing its most necessary duties. Clearly, in favour of every criminal, some consideration of humanity may be invoked; but, in this instance, were they allowed to prevail, what, I ask, would be the certain, the inevitable result? Why, the very parties now most clamorous for the royal pity and forgiveness, would be foremost to-morrow in attributing to far different motives the suspension of the legitimate action of justice. No, no, the matter may not rest as it now stands, that is, unless the imprudent friends of Antonio Perez, and many he has, should, by a distinct admission of the whole of their patron's guilt, put an end, once and for ever, to those foul

aspersions against the crown itself which they have contributed mainly both to devise and to propagate."

"Exactly—just so," exclaimed the Governor, much relieved by this timely and decided exposition of his private adviser's views. "Perez can, whenever he pleases, put a satisfactory end to the whole matter, and this I shall decidedly urge him to do, should we succeed in arresting him."

"But then he will, by his own confession, have deserved the very doom that he is struggling to avert," replied the unsubdued Condesa.

"Well, amiga," said the Conde, impatiently, "cannot you see that as much nearly has already been wrung from him by the torture, and that it were safer now, as well as more dutiful, at once to throw himself upon the royal clemency?"

"I will say no more, Señor, lest my pertinacity should offend you," respectfully answered Dona Elvira, "but I must own that I am still unconverted, and so, I trust, is the Señor de Villafior."

While our hero tacitly signified his assent

to this most welcome appeal, Maldonado calmly resumed :

"I think, at all events, that we may set our mind at rest here as to the contingency of the Senor Perez's taking refuge in the Principality. It will soon be discovered, I have little doubt, that he has proceeded no further than Saragossa, there to claim the independent jurisdiction of Aragon."

"If such is the case, can he much be blamed?" inquired the Condesa, in a more diffident tone than before.

"Time will show, madam, time will show," gravely responded Don Diego. "But serious will be the responsibility which must fall to his lot, should he succeed, as I much fear he may, in raising anew the long obsolete conflict between the privileges of the haughty Aragonese, and the legitimate authority of the Crown."

With these words, how singularly prophetic in their bearing none present, not even the speaker himself, could then have told, the general conversation for the evening closed. Soon afterwards, however, as the Conde, fol-

lowed by Maldonado, was accompanying the captain of the garrison to the door, Dona Elvira approached our hero and said, in a tone which, though low, struck strangely upon his soul :

“ And so, Senor de Villafior, your heart also is with the captive in his bonds, with the victim in the uttermost depth of his oppression?”

“ Yes, madam, it is ever with the victim,” whispered Moriz, scarcely aware himself, perchance, how truly that answer conveyed his most secret but wildest feelings.

We will leave you to judge, gentle reader, in what frame of mind our hero retired to his couch after the varied incidents of that eventful day. Was it a dream, a too blissful trance; or had his senses not deceived him; had the lovely Dona Elvira in truth accepted the devotion of his life for some unnamed, undefined, but still not unimagined emergency? How could he otherwise account for all that had so unexpectedly occurred between them, her anxious interrogations, her earnest advice, and above all, that fast-fled but heavenly look of gratitude with which she had responded to his

humble proffer of unflinching allegiance? Was it some fantasy of his over-wrought brain, or had she, later in the evening, and several hours after their more private interview, still sought in his eyes for some fresh expression of mutual sympathy, and even devised for him, ere she withdrew, an occasion for imparting that last solemn avowal which she alone could comprehend? Strange and almost appalling as were such conclusions, and the convulsive joy that they bore with them, would it not be more extraordinary still that he should have ventured to speak as he had spoken, to look as he had looked, nay, even to feel as he had felt, had no inducement, however slight, been vouchsafed to him? No, her words might have misled him, for they were ever perplexing as those of the fabled Sibyl; but the whole brightness of her smile had shone upon his soul—that smile where neither doubt nor deception could dwell; some contingency was foreseen, and certainly must arise, in which his services would be required by her; and knowing henceforth, as she must know, how gladly he would forfeit his existence upon the slightest sign from her, she

... of his happy  
each allurements of hope, until  
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he actually conceived himself en  
than twenty different encoun  
Condesa's mysterious foes.

On the following day, his  
so far recovered the mastery, as  
more maturely to examine the r  
the change which had so sudden  
his spirit; but the result of the  
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met the Condesa, he could disti  
that her former voice, look, and  
wards him were so altered as t  
some slight degree at least, his  
pations. She frequently address

**Maldonado.** The tremulous anxiety of her eye had vanished, and while she still discussed with him, as freely as was her wont, there was a conscious firmness in her tone which the ominous glance and the ambiguous retorts of Don Diego were no longer sufficient to subdue. The latter was far too keen an observer of all that took place around him, more particularly where he was himself concerned, not immediately to notice these new symptoms; but, with characteristic composure, he proceeded first to ascertain, as far as lay in his power, their true nature and extent. It was with this view, doubtless, that, meeting the haughty Condesa on her own terms, he controverted her opinions and sentiments as openly and somewhat more sternly than usual; so that, insensibly, during both the dinner and the supper, their discourse seemed frequently on the point of degenerating into one of those altercations which somewhat call for the intervention of a third party. In these cases, however, both the Governor and Sirena were as usual not very attentive listeners; while Moriz, we lament to say, was too well satisfied

with the probable result to throw any impediments in the way of its completion.

Thus it was that, towards the end of the supper, Maldonado, having led his fair antagonist into the most irritating of all discussions—religious controversy, and having responded to some not very guarded taunts of hers by a most inimitably satirical exposition of the views that she had just expressed herself, upon the important doctrine of Christian humility and forbearance, she retorted, in her turn, with considerable warmth:

“My opinions are those which have been taught to me by my spiritual director: yours appear to me those behind which all cravens are accustomed to screen their cowardice.”

Maldonado wanted no more. He fixed his steady, relentless eye full upon the Condesa, and calmly replied:—

“Were that worthy but somewhat abstruse ecclesiastic here, madam, he would warn you, I think, that you are flying in the face of the precept as well as of the dogma. Courage in cavaliers is like the honour of fair ladies; it must never be assailed, unless there be posi-

tive proof that it is forfeited. Shall I apply to his excellency upon the point? we could have no higher arbitrator."

"There is this difference, mind, Maldonado," said the Conde, who had distinctly heard the last phrase: "a convent is the lot of our wives and of our daughters if they sully our name; but we shoot our sons with our own hands should they blench on their second battle-field."

"Ay, Señor, on their second," replied Don Diego; "in their case you would allow for the usual effect of strong natural inducement upon early youth. In the former instance, however, I do not think that you would knowingly grant the opportunity for a second fall."

"No, indeed," answered the rugged veteran, with his sternest smile.

Where was now the pride of the haughty Elvira! Why was her eye quailing as never yet it had been seen to quail before that of Maldonado; and why did the paleness of death itself overspread her lovely features while these simple observations were exchanged? Why was her adversary himself constrained at once

"And yet," said he, "the  
the convent for every irrev  
human existence—from the d  
powers of enjoyment have first  
to that on which the dungeon  
respond to the last faint gasp  
and desolate heart—that is in  
doom! No wonder that its  
should so conjure the blood from  
cheek, that were she Don El  
Doña Elvira de Sierra Dorada  
this guise, on his second ba  
Conde's pistolet would even now  
her devoted head. Happy I am  
the holy prison will in no case b  
that my worst expectation sh  
sharp, but soon paid penalty, wh  
that I am

interposed the Condesa, in a subdued and tremulous tone. "I spoke, or at least I intended to speak, in the most general terms, of those who would seek a convenient refuge from the duties of worldly honour in the perverted doctrines of religion: having intended no particular application, I can be responsible for none."

"Then I suppose," said the imperturbable Maldonado, with his usual ominous smile, "that I must rest convicted of having unwittingly claimed for myself a no very enviable distinction. Ah! conscience, conscience, eternal, unfailing traitor! Why should my own misgivings of what I may or may not feel in the unknown ordeal of the battle-field have led me thus almost to declare myself what I most loathe and dread to be reckoned! May I trust at least, Villafior, that you experienced some similar doubts ere you had put your youthful valour to its first test?"

"Unquestionably," replied Moriz, who had all the unassuming modesty of true courage. "When we calmly reflect upon the listed field, we can see naught but its dangers; no sooner

do we tread it than the fierce spirit of contention swells our heart, and the maddening impulse of rivalry urges us ever onwards in its reckless chase. I have heard my poor father say, and he was esteemed a fair judge in these matters, that few could be valiant in the onslaught were they to remain at the same time calm and indifferent."

"There is some truth in that, I believe," said the Captain-General, as he gave the signal for retiring to the drawing-room.

During the remainder of the evening, the Condesa conversed with Dona Sirena alone, and at an earlier hour than usual withdrew to her private apartment.

I suppose I need not tell you, gentle reader, that the incident which we have just retraced, created the deepest impression in the mind of Villafior; but perhaps you will be surprised to hear that he was at no great loss to account for the very striking effect which the mere mention of the doom reserved at that period for the guilty spouses of the great had produced upon the pure, the innocent, the universally esteemed Dona Elvira. Untutored

and inexperienced as he still was in the arts of gallantry, he had been at once struck to the heart with the conviction that what had occurred between him and the Condesa on the previous day must have been noted or divined by the subtle Maldonado, and that, whether from friendly motives or otherwise, Don Diego had taken this first opportunity of warning solemnly either party as to the perils which they might soon incur. True it was that the devotion so humbly proffered on one side and so guardedly accepted on the other, by no means involved any departure from the paths of duty; but still Moriz could with difficulty conceal from himself that the most ardent aspirations had been aroused within him; and to what could these ultimately tend, saving to that triumph which must be the ruin of her for whose welfare and happiness he had declared himself ready and willing to sacrifice every earthly consideration. It is not very surprising that these serious reflections should have been maturely dwelt upon by our youthful hero, and that, while they induced him to watch with the greatest cir-

rested in the excitement of  
days.

This expectation, or, to  
rectly, perhaps, this foreboding  
to be most amply realized.  
morning, Villafior could observe  
engaged in an animated conversation  
Maldonado, as they walked a  
the stately gardens of the palace  
that hour, her manner towards  
all its former coldness and  
ference. At first, he could, as  
neither surprised nor offended  
expediency of which he would  
induced himself to suggest, had  
appreciated on the part of the  
however, is the perversity of the  
particularly when it comes to

one single word of encouragement, one single look of consolation, or indeed so much as one smile, which could have warned him that prudence and a keen sense of duty had their full share in this fatally renewed estrangement, his own wiser scruples, and consequent resignation, insensibly gave way to a sentiment of sorely wounded pride. Ceaseless were the efforts which he made to impress upon her who inflicted these sufferings, some adequate conception both of their cause and of their extent, or at least to attract once more some slight earnest of her regard or of her notice, but it was all in vain. She seemed ever to shun, no less sedulously than he sought it, any opportunity for their more private intercourse, while, when others were present, she addressed him less frequently than ever, and her averted eye no more encountered his own.

We will not attempt to describe the state of phrenzy into which these continued, and apparently hopeless symptoms of disregard, finally drove their impetuous victim. We will merely say, that in that spirit of fitful

animosity which ardent devotion, when it is unrequited and disappointed, is apt to engender, Moriz was finally impelled to seek some solace for his injured and over-wrought feelings in the very line of conduct, which, as he conceived, was likely to prove most distasteful to the now hated object of his neglected solicitude. He grew unremitting in his outward attentions to Doña Sirena; he studiously cultivated his intercourse with Maldonado; and as both of these parties, for motives of their own, very freely seconded such dispositions on his side, it might almost have been supposed, ere our hero had been long established at Barcelona, that each of them respectively engrossed in the highest degree his homage and his friendship. Would that had been so indeed, and that he, whose adventures we are here retracing, had more distinctly remembered how incumbent it was upon him to eschew, not only all contemplation of a guilty, but also those unavowed yet treacherous aspirations which, under the guise of manly and chivalrous sympathy, were such subtle but sure possession of his heart.

## CHAPTER XI.

WE must now, gentle reader, suffer a year to elapse ere we again introduce you to the small family circle of the Conde de Sierra Dorada; a whole year, which, while it produced no very sensible alteration in the mutual connexion of the persons, who, we trust, have principally engrossed your attention of late, was marked, in the political world, with many events of no inconsiderable moment for the Spanish monarchy.

As the prophetic glance of Maldonado had correctly calculated from the first, Antonio Perez had escaped from the prisons of Madrid, not that he might actually evade the pursuit

longer he seemed to seem as  
the obscure and mysterious  
sovereign authority, but bot  
await that sentence, which,  
impartial judgment of history  
to either the doom which he  
served, according to their res  
the subject to be attained in  
the monarch in his reputation  
a matter of doubt to those  
attentively studied the ever  
which we are now recalling, and  
the previous confidence and a  
II. for his favourite minister  
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whether the latter were fine  
the animosity of the many  
friends who had vowed to a

little uncertainty, we should presume, now prevails as to the direct agency of the King in the assassination of his brother's most dangerous and most reckless counsellor. Unquestionably, Perez must ever stand convicted of having principally planned the nefarious deed, from motives of personal ill-will towards the aspiring Don Juan's secretary, or from the mere servility of the basest ambition, or, perchance, under the impulse of both these sentiments combined. Still, his fickle and treacherous sovereign must not the less bear the too well founded imputation of having himself very distinctly inspired and countenanced the bloody act; and there is every reason to believe, that the consciousness that such would very probably be the verdict of posterity, contributed not a little to precipitate the vindictive monarch into that course of action, which, while it eventually tended mainly to establish his own complicity, led him into some of the most serious political embarrassments of his reign.

With the details of the judicial proceedings thus so imprudently, yet so pertinaciously fol-

lowed up by Philip II. against his discarded favourite, we have no direct and immediate concern. Happy would it have been for him and for others, if, in accordance with the advice of his privileged jester, the Uncle Martin, he had been satisfied to join in the general sentiment of gratulation with which the escape of Perez from Madrid was greeted at the Spanish Court. Unfortunately, far other sentiments were allowed to sway his decisions; the wife and children of the fugitive were arrested forthwith, and orders were given to the royal authorities in Aragon to arraign the culprit before the supreme tribunal of the Justicia Mayor. Don Inigo de Mendoza, Marques d'Almenara, who was then at Saragossa, with the title of Royal Commissioner, lost no time in executing these orders, and it was then that Perez, having repeatedly and frequently addressed himself in vain to the personal clemency and forbearance of the King, drew up and published his celebrated Memorial, clearly and incontrovertibly establishing all the facts of the case. The effect produced by this document was decisive: the King solemnly

renounced his suit before the chief court of Aragon, upon the count of murder, and Perez was acquitted. A second indictment, and then a third, upon other charges, were attended with no better success for the agents of the royal vengeance, and the victim, now clamorous for his release, seemed on the point of escaping from his persecutors, when he was most unexpectedly summoned before another and more formidable tribunal, that of the Holy Inquisition.

The various incidents of these proceedings had not ceased in the meantime to be canvassed, with the utmost interest, by the divers inmates of the Governor's palace, each of whom had more or less ostensibly maintained the opinions and sentiments which they had originally expressed. Thus, while the Conde de Sierra Dorada and Maldonado had been stauncher than ever in their professed conviction that the King had not ceased to be perfectly well advised in the inflexible prosecution of these designs, both Doña Elvira and Villafior had persisted in entertaining, and even in sometimes betraying their former

misgivings upon this head. Each party had naturally been somewhat more or less confident in his own judgment, according to the successive alternations of the very intricate case that they were discussing; each had had in its turn more than one occasion for claiming a momentary victory, and that of the two more youthful members appeared to be definitively established, when, at the time that we shall re-introduce them, gentle reader, to your kindly notice, the fresh reversal in the fortunes of Perez, to which we have just now alluded, again seemed to incline the scale in favour of the prognostications so constantly advocated by Maldonado.

As this subtle personage one evening entered the withdrawing-room, while the family party were assembled there after the supper, from which meal he had himself been absent, he approached the Condesa, and said:—

“ I trust, madam, that, with your usual indulgence, you will forgive this very irregular conduct on my part, but I was deciphering a somewhat curious letter, which I have just received from Madrid.”

"Indeed I cannot, Don Diego," graciously replied she, "unless you offer us a slight compensation for the loss of your society, by imparting to us something of the interesting information which you have doubtless received."

"If you require it, madam, I must obey; but my news, I fear, will scarcely be very acceptable either to you or to my friend Villafior. The Señor Perez's judicial adventures are not yet at an end, and he is to be arraigned before the tribunal of the Holy Inquisition."

"Indeed!" said the Condesa, "and upon what head?"

"As having been frequently guilty of the most blasphemous and heretical language."

"And who are the witnesses against him?"

"The Marques d'Almenara will, I understand, succeed in producing two, one of whom, Diego Bustamente, has been eighteen years in the service of Perez."

"The baser traitor he!" muttered the free-hearted Doña Elvira.

"You seem to forget, mi querida," interposed the Governor, "that the duty which every son of the church owes to the Holy Office

is not less paramount than the authority of the sacred tribunal itself."

"Far be it from me, Señor, to call either in question," was the respectful reply.

"Such, I trust," resumed Maldonado, "will also be the opinion of the Aragonese; and yet, a rather delicate question may here arise. Antonio Perez having claimed the jurisdiction of Aragon, some of the wilder spirits there may object to his extradition, even though it be required by that authority, which, as his excellency has most truly said, is paramount in Spain. I have letters from Saragossa which induce me to think that already some rather serious excitement prevails there upon this head."

"I cannot conceive," said the Conde, "how the supreme authority of the Holy Office can be disputed."

"Your excellency is unquestionably right, and yet there are not a few in Aragon who would consider the fueros as decidedly violated should a prisoner, under the jurisdiction of that kingdom, be delivered over to

the Castilian authorities upon any conceivable pretence."

"I hear many persons in Barcelona professing the same doctrine," here interposed Villafior.

"I am well aware of it," resumed Maldonado; "and have little doubt that, should the partisans of Antonio Perez, by whom," added he, smiling, "I by no means intend to designate any one here present—but should his Aragonese partisans succeed in creating any disturbance in that kingdom, the contagion would spread to this province. I should, therefore, deferentially suggest to his excellency the propriety of warning the military authorities under his command to hold themselves in readiness for the immediate repression of any popular outbreak."

"It is certainly as well that they should be on their guard," replied the sturdy veteran; "but I should be surprised, Maldonado, that any question concerning the Aragonese privileges should, in this age, so deeply affect our hard-headed Catalonians."

"The Aragonese war-cry, Señor, might be

the pretext as well as the cause of some popular manifestation. Your dutiful subjects have, or conceive they have, some choice grievances of their own, such, for instance, as our re-imposed impost upon their salt. Villafior, who mixes among them more than I do, is very much struck indeed with their distaste for this duty. I believe, if your excellency were to consult him, we should go to the length of recommending some revision of it to his majesty."

"Santa Maria!" exclaimed the Governor; "that would be a novel proceeding on my part: I am not conscious of ever having yet entered into any similar compromise, when the King's authority, as delegated to me, was in question."

"Your excellency must allow me to say," observed Moriz, with a smile, "that my friend Maldonado has somewhat forcibly stated what opinions I may have ventured to express upon the matter. My principal informant is my page, who has contracted the evil habit of too frequently resorting to a neighbouring posada, where many clowns from

the adjacent villages are wont to assemble, and somewhat vociferously to expound their sentiments. I do think, from what I have been told, that his majesty can scarcely be aware how serious and how general are both the sufferings and the disaffection produced by this tax: more I am not conscious of having either implied or conceived."

"The King's government cannot be conducted without taxes," resumed the Conde; "and I know of few imposts which are very cheerfully paid. In this case, however, the corregidor has not yet informed me that any very great excitement prevails."

"Your excellency will have the best opportunity of judging yourself on the first of next month," observed Maldonado: "the great bullfight will, no doubt, attract thousands of those who are the least scrupulous in publicly expressing their sentiments, and if they have any serious grievance at heart, they will very probably give no inaudible utterance to it on that festive occasion."

"I trust that nothing will occur to prevent

our going to the Corrida," here interposed Doña Sirena.

"It will be a fierce insurrection if it prevents my attending," exclaimed the Condesa. "I am actually expiring to witness once more that noble spectacle, all that we, poor women, may ever see or know of war."

"And I should almost venture to wager," said the Governor, "that my podagrical attack will just exactly remain in store for me until that day. It has seldom failed, within the last three years, to spare me when I was most resigned to endure it, and to seize upon me when it was most thoroughly unwelcome."

"Do not foresee, Señor, any such annoyance," observed Maldonado; "for the very apprehension will sometimes contribute to the result."

"You are right there, amigo, and as to your other forebodings, why, no later than to-morrow, we can advise my worthy lieutenants to look closely to the edge of their swords and to the matches of their arquebuses."

Upon this judicious conclusion, the Conde retired with Doña Elvira and Sirena, leaving

the two secretaries to prosecute their conjectures respecting the apparently forthcoming crisis.

"I do not know how it is," resumed Maldonado, after a few moments of silence, "but a secret intuitive feeling, which has seldom misled me, now warns me that some important event is at hand. The sympathy for Antonio Perez is greater in Aragon than I have yet stated to the Governor; the nobility are very ardent in his cause and no less confident of popular support; and as the King will certainly not yield, we shall, ere long, I have little doubt, receive some stirring news from Saragossa."

"But are proceedings actually instituted against Perez before the Holy Inquisition?"

"They are," said Maldonado; "and since I can have no secrets from you, Villafior, I will impart to you all my information. When I was myself connected with the Holy Office, by whom, as I lately told you, I was for three years confidentially employed, I was very intimately acquainted with Molina de Medrano, who is now chief inquisitor at Saragossa. It

is he from whom I have this day heard, and I could have no better authority, as the Marques d'Almenara has confided to him the delicate task of drawing up these new informations against Perez. The document was forwarded by Medrano to the Cardinal - Archbishop of Toledo, Inquisitor - General, who transmitted it to his majesty's confessor, Diego de Chaves, to have his opinion as calificador. If you are curious to see it, here it is; but read it at once, as I am bound to return it immediately to Medrano, with my observations, should I have any to make."

Villafior retired apart, that he might attentively peruse this curious paper, from which, thanks to the researches of an eminent modern historian, we are enabled to extract the following authentic passages, as a curious specimen of the casuistical sophistry of the times :

"Agreeably to the order of the very illustrious Cardinal of Toledo, Inquisitor-General, a faithful copy has been remitted to me, of certain additional articles which have been annexed to the papers relating to the proceedings now pending against Antonio Perez, secretary to his majesty, as well as of the evidence of the different witnesses, that I might see and examine the whole, and

express my opinion thereupon. After such examination, carefully made, I have noted the following propositions :—

“Some one having once advised Antonio Perez not to speak ill of the Prince Don Juan of Austria, the said Perez answered :—*Since the King has reproached me with having wilfully misinterpreted the letters which I wrote, and with having betrayed the secrets of the Council, I must justify myself without considering others: if God the Father were to seek to prevent me, I would cut off his nose for having allowed the King to behave towards me in a manner so little worthy of a loyal knight.*—QUALIFICATION. This proposition, insomuch as it states that if God the Father had stood in the way, *his nose would have been cut off*, is a blasphemous and scandalous proposition, offensive to pious ears, and savouring of the heresy of the Vadiani, who pretend that God is corporeal, and that he has human members. Nor can it be excused on the ground that Christ has a body and a nose, since He was made Man, as it is clear that the First Person of the Most Holy Trinity is here alluded to——

“The same Antonio Perez has said :—*I am quite come to the end of my belief. It appears to me, that God slumbers in the affairs which concern me, and unless He perform some miracle respecting them, I shall be reduced almost to the point of entirely losing my faith.*—QUALIFICATION. This proposition is scandalous and offensive to pious ears, insomuch as it says of God, that He sleeps in the concerns of Perez, as if the latter were innocent and without reproach, a man judicially put to the torture, condemned to death, and accused of the most serious misdeeds !

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"Antonio Perez, upon one of those occasions when he was tormented by grief and anxiety on learning what his wife and children had undergone, exclaimed : *God slumbers, God slumbers. All that has been told us respecting the existence of God must be a fallacy ; there can be no God.*—QUALIFICATION. This proposition, inasmuch as it affirms and repeats that *God slumbers*, and as connected with what follows, savours of heresy ; as if God had not, respecting human concerns, that care which we are taught that He has both by the Holy Scriptures and the Catholic Church. As to the other two portions of the proposition ; the first : *All that has been told us respecting the existence of God must be a fallacy* ; the second : *There can be no God*, they are heretical, because, though we might much excuse them by saying that they were doubtfully advanced, he that doubts in matters of faith is an infidel, for he that doubts a thing neither believes nor disbelieves it. A man is obliged positively to adhere to one view or to the other ; should he disbelieve, he is not a Christian, and he that doubts, as I have just said, does not believe.

"Perez, full of wrath on seeing the manner, unjust according to him, with which he was treated, and the share taken in his persecution by persons, who, as he conceived, had good reasons for acting otherwise, but who did not the less enjoy the reputation which attaches to irreproachable conduct, has said : *Oh ! I renounces the milk which I have sucked— I should no longer believe in God, if such things could occur.*—QUALIFICATION. This proposition, *I should no longer believe in God, if such things could occur*, is a blasphemous, scandalous proposition, and, as connected with what precedes, cannot be held exempt from the suspicion of heresy."

As Moriz perused this singular document, he felt his blood run cold, and when questioned by Maldonado as to his sentiments respecting it, he could not forbear exclaiming, with unrepressed indignation:—

“Who on the face of this noble creation could be esteemed a true son of the Church, who could be safe even at his own fireside, if such accusations as these could be tendered and entertained against him?”

“Ah, ah!” muttered Maldonado, with some such a smile as may o’erspread a dilettante surgeon’s features when inspecting an emphatically good accident; “it is a cunning and well qualified censure. I have seen the San Benito placed upon more than one head for less matter than is therein contained. Were I concerned in following up the case, I should lean principally upon that last paragraph but one, and so I shall suggest to Medrano. The difficulty, however, is not there: how the person of the prisoner is to be transferred again to Madrid is a far more serious consideration. Still, if manly energy can compass that, Medrano will accomplish it.”

Don Diego having received the paper from his companion, resumed in silence, for several minutes, his stealthy walk through the noble apartment; he then rejoined, in a singular tone of deep but compressed exultation:—

“ I like this news, upon the whole, Moriz,— I like it well. I am tired of sailing the bark of my fortunes upon the smooth surface of these calm, untroubled waters. Why, a child could direct her course there, and long would it be ere the amiable breath of this summer breeze would impel her to the blissful, the long-promised shore. I sigh again to see the billows raising their rebellious crests, and to hear the topmasts groaning under the freshening gale. Methinks that I can already discern, far, far, upon the distant horizon, the Azrael of the deep, slowly arising from his watery couch and unfurling his sable wings. Oh! for the glorious speed of the awakening storm! Then, Moriz, will be the time for action; then the craven landsman will sink back from the helm, and all eyes will be fixed upon the true pilot, who alone can steer the vessel through the rugged channel; but you

will stand by me then: you remember our compact?"

"I well do, Diego, and I have been longing for many months to act up to it; but no opportunity has yet offered; nor, to be frank with you, do I well see how one could be created for us, even were a serious outbreak to occur at Saragossa."

"It would spread, amigo, it would spread like wildfire from Saragossa throughout Aragon, and from Aragon to our own, ay,—our own province of Catalonia."

"Well, and what then?"

"What then? Why, who will stem the furious current, and bear the standard of royal authority high, high over its roaring waves——"

"Who, Maldonado?" replied Moriz, with a smile. "The Captain-General surely, assisted by his valiant equerry and military secretary."

"Oh! to be sure," answered Don Diego, in the same tone; "but, in such matters, the merit and the credit of the conduct are not quite synonymous; the former may well rest in one quarter, and the latter be attributed to

another. Those who are high in office at Madrid, are well aware that, stout-hearted as may be the old Governor, any violent excitement now rivets him to his couch with an attack of rheumatism or of gout; and as to the valourous equerry, why his qualities and his very name indeed are as yet unknown to them. To speak more seriously, however, there may very probably be small advantage enough for either of us, even should these great and favourable events occur. We are not ambitious, Moriz, we are not ambitious enough."

"Indeed! I was not conscious of that deficiency on either side."

"Were those here," continued Don Diego, thoughtfully, "were those here in our stead, who were truly and unscrupulously bent upon achieving distinction, they might succeed."

"I should be curious to know how, Maldonado?"

"Well, child, you can see that any day a question may arise here, involving serious interests and important consequences. Shall I take, for instance, this salt duty? If persevered in, it may produce an outbreak; if

abandoned, it may create a grave financial embarrassment. Now, an active, far-seeing, and not over conscientious secretary, having a few friends and informers at Madrid, might ascertain pretty clearly which of these contingencies would be most unwelcome at Court, and might bring that one about. You understand me, amigo?" added he, casting upon his young companion one look of the intensest inquiry.

"Not at all, I lament to say," was the ingenuous reply.

"Let me see how I can assist you in compassing it. Supposing his majesty to have particular reasons for dreading an outbreak in Catalonia at this moment, while the state of his finances were such as to render the proceeds of the said salt-tax of no very momentous importance; and supposing that, by the blind obstinacy with which the impost was collected, the people were goaded on to civil war, what do you think might happen to the Captain-General?"

"Well, he would very probably be recalled and disgraced."

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"Does that stagger you,  
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over vigilant friends at court. An easier process by far, where two parties are sincerely allied, would be that each, acting of course in the interest of both, should perform one of these parts."

"I begin to comprehend, Diego,—at least I think so. Taking the government to be, *exempli gratia*, the province of Barcelona, the object a most embarrassing insurrection, the advisers, any parties but you and myself; one of them would see that nothing was neglected by the Captain-General which could precipitate the outbreak, the other would secure for himself at Madrid the credit of having constantly foreseen and deprecated it; the chief would be sacrificed, the judicious counsellor exalted, and his ally, through his influence, ultimately rewarded."

"Very well expounded, indeed, amigo," said Don Diego, with the same look as before; "but all hypothetically spoken, of course? Neither of us, I conceive, is ambitious to this extent."

"Santa Maria! I trust not, indeed," exclaimed Villafior, as he suddenly rose with an

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least of all resist; and when they who are thus highly gifted by nature endeavour to please or to subdue, who can pretend always to withstand them? There was, besides, in Don Diego's manner, that peculiar dexterity which would seem to follow the very impulse which it imparts, and to be swayed by those whom it is secretly attracting within its sphere. No one could more ably enforce that maxim of the great philosopher of his age, which recommends compliance as the surest road to command, and thus it was that, in common with many others, Villafior was most under the charm of Maldonado's influence when he would least acknowledge it.

"A cunning dog that Diego," muttered he to himself as he retired alone to his apartment; "lucky it is, for him as well as for myself, that I have my eye upon him, or heaven only knows what folly he might not commit in his restless desire for preferment. Still, I must confess to a strong partiality for him; there is something bold and original in his conceptions which suits me, but I wish he would contrive by honest means an opportunity for action. I am tired of these empty speculations."

## CHAPTER XII.

ABOUT ten days after the conversation in which these reflections had originated, when our hero entered the withdrawing-room, at the hour of the evening repast, he found the Condesa sitting there alone with Doña Sirena.

"Have you seen the Governor lately, Señor de Villafior?" said the former. "I am surprised that he should not be here by this time."

"No, madam," replied Moriz; "I have been, since sunset, exercising your jennet and that of the Lady Sirena, and I trust that they will be both well in hand for you at the Corrida to-morrow."

"I should think that my uncle has received

a messenger, for I saw a strange man in the vestibule just now, whose dress and appearance seemed to tell of a long and hasty ride."

"Very probably, Señora, but I have had no summons from his excellency."

"If a courier has come," resumed Doña Elvira, "we may have some time to wait; I wish you would take your guitar, Sirena, and sing us one of your last romances."

This request having been very warmly seconded by Moriz, the amiable Sirena could not but comply, stipulating, however, as a condition, that she would ere long hand the guitar to the Señor de Villafior. A first cantilena, then a second, then even a third, was obtained, after which further concession was inexorably refused, until the corresponding terms of the agreement were fulfilled.

"Indeed, madam," said our hero, "I am loath to resist, but still more loath to obey. The Condesa infinitely prefers hearing you sing."

"I am quite indifferent in the matter," coldly returned Doña Elvira.

"But I am not," resumed Sirena; "I must,

I will obtain what you promised, or seemed to promise just now."

Thus urged, Villafior took the guitar, and proposed either an Andalusian romance, or one that he had brought back with him from the western hemisphere. The latter having been demanded by both his fair companions, he struck at once into a wild and singularly plaintive strain, the purport of which may be gathered from the following rude and imperfect paraphrase of the original verse:—

"How fair is thy form, Son of the glowing East !  
Thy face is brighter than the polished metal of thy war  
suit braided with steel and gold ! Is thy heart as  
hard ?

"When first I saw thee, thy hand was red with the  
blood of my people, and thy proud courser was neighing  
with joy on the ruins of my desolate home ! Why didst  
thou spare poor Teleka ?

"Happy had it been for her if thy uplifted sword had  
laid her by the side of her murdered brothers. Why  
didst thou smile upon her, and bear her away in thy  
arms ?

"Her heart would have flown free and pure into the  
bosom of the Great Spirit, there to rest for ever. Now  
it is a captive and sorely wounded. Thou canst not  
tell how it bleeds when I gaze upon thee.

"O turn and look once more upon thy hand-maiden,

thy slave : shall she not fan the flies from thy couch, or follow thee far, far into the dark woods, until another ocean be reached ?

“Or shouldst thou return to thine own home, in the land of the rising sun, she will not fear to sail with thee on thy lofty bark ; for the hurricane is less fierce and less proud than thou, and thou canst tame him.

“Thine eye can subdue the restless billows, as it has conquered me. It can teach them also to bow before thee, and minister to thy course. Once I was as free as they, but now my soul is thine !”

It might have been remarked by a somewhat attentive observer, that whenever Villalor would sing, which was seldom enough, and only in compliance with a strongly-urged request, Doña Elvira would express no opinion upon the performanc, and remain in a state of deep and silent abstraction, even for some minutes after it had ceased. This, to be sure, could be accounted for by the indifference which we have just heard her affect upon the subject ; but, however that might be, Doña Sirena's enthusiastic delight would generally afford ample compensation for her aunt's reserve, and so it proved in this case. There are few young ladies of her age who are not conversant with every synonyme for the

epithet "lovely," and each one was now brought into the field to denote her rapturous approbation.

"Now, Señor de Villafior," added she at length, "pray tell me, if you think that poor Teleka did accompany her captor on his return home?"

"Indeed, Señora," replied Moriz, smiling, "you ask more than I can say."

"Of course," exclaimed the Condesa, with a slightly sarcastic tone; "you cannot expect the conqueror to give us any further details upon his victory."

Villafior was not quite unaccustomed to something of a similar accent and manner on the part of Doña Elvira, when she would join in any conversation between him and her niece. In this case, however, the implied taunt appeared to him rather gratuitous, and we fear that his looks betrayed a little resentment, when he said—

"Pray do not believe, Doña Sirena, that I am in any way responsible for poor Teleka's sufferings; and, as to her ultimate fate, perhaps you may judge, as well as I can, what it

will have been. Do you feel as if you really could have traversed the ocean with your preserver?"

"I do, but he might have rejected me."

"Every conclusion to the romaunt were possible, saving that one, Señora," returned Villafior, in a tone which mantled the youthful beauty's cheek with a blush, that none of her sister roses could have beheld without envy.

A moment's silence here ensued, and it was broken by the Condesa, who exclaimed—

"Sirena, as your uncle is evidently delayed, would not you do well to see if our skirts for the bull-fight have been returned, for we should send again if they have not?"

Doña Sirena retired, with no great apparent alacrity, in compliance with this injunction, and our hero thus found himself, for the first time since many months, alone with the imperious Elvira.

Alas! for the imperfection of all human happiness! How often are we granted what we have most ardently desired, but with such unforeseen qualifications and restrictions in the accomplishment, that there where we are

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dresses are not come home, for doubtless Doña Sirena would have returned before this, to impart the welcome intelligence."

"It may be so indeed, Señor," replied the unbending Condesa, "or perhaps the said dresses may be arrived, and she is inspecting them; a pleasure, which, I lament to say, she may perchance prefer even to that of your society."

"A most judicious preference, unquestionably, madam," replied Villafior, "and one of which no man should have the presumption to complain. Who would venture to enter into competition with a sentiment which, in fair ladies, rules every other?"

"Say rather, Señor, which is held, or said, so to rule every other among them by those who may have general or accidental reasons for reviling us. Still, even they must allow, I suppose, that we may have other, perhaps minor feelings, with which it is not reckoned particularly honourable for cavaliers to trifle."

Villafior was too much surprised and startled at this observation clearly to comprehend its

bearing, or to attempt any reply. The Condesa was, therefore, constrained to resume, after a moment's silence:

"Girls of Sirena's age, while of course more intent upon their dress than upon any other object, may, I repeat, be susceptible of some other affections; and these, I should esteem it, I must own, equally unbecoming and ungenerous to awaken out of mere sport. Do you agree with me so far, Señor de Villafior?"

"Most decidedly, madam."

"Then may I ask," continued she, her colour slightly rising, while her voice grew somewhat fainter and more tremulous, "may I ask if you know no one here to whom these reflections might apply?"

"No one, madam, whomsoever," was the firm answer.

"What, no one, Señor, who, by his general manner, attentions, and compliments, may be every day leading more and more an inexperienced girl to believe, that she is imparting those sentiments, which, notwithstanding our all-absorbing passion for dress—

it is still in our nature to conceive too frequently when we believe that we inspire them? A heartless mockery that, Señor de Villafior, which uses, in mere thoughtlessness or irony, the sacred language of passion!"

"If these observations can in any way apply to me, madam, as I much fear they do in your intention, by your look and by your manner," responded Villafior, somewhat haughtily, "I am so much at a loss to remember or to discern how anything from me can have given rise to them, that I must entreat you to come still further to the assistance of my memory or of my understanding. I am as unconscious as the unborn infant of ever having addressed a single word to Doña Sirena, the full meaning and bearing of which I did not completely feel; nor am I satisfied, that I have ever yet offered her sufficient acknowledgment for the unfailing courtesy and kindness which she has shown to me here from the very first day."

"Oh! if such is the case," retorted the Condesa hastily, "as the appointed guardian of Sirena's happiness and welfare I have

intentions, and not unnaturally with respect to the future estate of my niece, would be exactly in those which one might be expected to find from what I have just heard.

There was something in the manner of the Condesa, as she made this reply, which wounded the impetuous Monsieur. He paused, pausing to reflect whether he seriously adopted or not her strained interpretation of his answer, he hastened to give another, which could best both convey and soften the sentiments that had been aroused.

"In truth, madam," said he, "I will take no steps to ascertain what your opinions may be on that head.

have shown, or may show to Doña Sirena, should be a cause of offence or concern to her relations!"

"Far be it from me to say so, Señor; but still, I must repeat, that those to whom the care of a noble damsel is committed, are bound to know something more respecting any favoured suitor than his mere name. However irresistibly qualified he may be personally, some adequate provision for the future is generally considered requisite, at least so I should think."

"And if," resumed Villafior, impelled by an invincible curiosity to discover what Doña Elvira's private feelings might be regarding the contingency which her own imagination was devising, "if I could satisfy you, that my own modest patrimony, together with the slight prospects of preferment to which I might venture to point, were such as somewhat to justify my pretensions, would you, madam, may I humbly ask, see no further objection?"

"I? None whatsoever that I am aware of. Parents and relations can after all but take certain precautions, beyond which, the

parties themselves must bear the responsibility of their own follies."

"Should they commit no greater folly, madam, than that of calling upon the Holy Church to consecrate the ties of nature and mutual inclination, they may be well left to bear the responsibility of their choice."

I fear that we cannot quite acquit our indignant hero of having intended here, an indirect and contrasted reflection upon Doña Elvira's own union with her veteran spouse. At all events, the implied allusion did not escape her, and fierce would, no doubt, have been her retort if the most opportune re-appearance of Doña Sirena, closely followed by her uncle and Maldonado, had not fortunately put an end to this most infelicitous conversation.

Leaving you, gentle reader, to determine which of the two youthful parties was soonest and most deeply to deplore his share in it, we must now call your attention to matters of far greater moment.

## CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN our hero's glance fell upon the Captain-General and the private secretary, as they entered the withdrawing-room together, the flushed cheek of the one and the expanded eye of the other would have warned him that some important intelligence had been received, even had his colleague not whispered in his ear, as they proceeded arm-in-arm to the supper-chamber :—

“The crisis is come, amigo; all Aragon is in arms against the royal authority, and Perez has been forcibly released from the hands of the Holy Inquisitors.”

Villafior was in that frame of mind which

renders any new excitement a welcome reprieve from its own irritation. He could, therefore, very freely respond, though for what motive he scarcely himself knew, to the secret but intense gratulation which his companion's countenance and voice very undisguisedly testified. He was constrained, however, to wait for all further particulars until, the hasty repast having been concluded, the small circle again found themselves in the welcome privacy of their evening sitting-room.

No sooner had the doors been closed upon them there, than the Condesa, approaching her husband, said, with her most winning smile:—

“Now, Seor, proceed at once to tell me all the news: I am sure it is most interesting, and I must know every particle of it.”

“Interesting it certainly is, querida, and that to your heart's content. A desperate insurrection, headed by the nobility, has broken out at Saragossa, and Antonio Perez has been rescued by the rebels, in defiance alike of the royal authority and of the judicial claims of the Holy Inquisition.”

"Well, that is news, indeed," exclaimed the Condesa; "but I must hear all the details. You must relate them to me, Señor de Maldonado, for I am sure the Governor will never tell me half enough."

"Then, madam, I suppose I must obey," answered Don Diego, "even at the risk of appearing to accept your implied compliment to my indiscretion. It would appear that, on the 21st of this month, the Inquisitor-General decided that Antonio Perez should be transferred to the secret prisons of the Holy Office in Aragon, there to undergo his new trial. This decree having been received at Saragossa, the Inquisitors, Molina de Medrano, Hurtado de Mendoza, and Morejon, assembled at their palace of the Aljaferia—you know Saragossa, I think, madam?"

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed the Condesa, "I perfectly remember the Aljaferia; it was the castle of the old Moorish kings."

"Precisely, madam. Well, the aforesaid Aragonese commissioners there assembled, immediately issued their decree for the arrest and removal of Perez."

"Was there an official decree, Maldonado?" here interposed the Governor. "I thought they merely sent one of their alguacils privately to the prison of the Manifestados."

"There were two official orders on their part, may it please your excellency," resumed Don Diego, "and they have been forwarded to us with the other papers. While your excellency was naturally intent upon the strategic particulars of the insurrection, I was perusing just now the judicial documents, so as to ascertain exactly what were the legal merits and bearings of the case. Shall I read these orders to your excellency? I have them here, I think, together with the despatches."

The Conde having signified his assent, Maldonado soon laid his hand upon the required papers, and read as follows:—

"We, the Inquisitors specially delegated by the apostolic authority against heretical perversity and apostacy in this kingdom of Aragon, together with the city and bishopric of Lerida, order you, Alonzo de Herrera, alguacil of this Holy Office, to proceed at once to this town of Saragossa, or wherever it may be necessary, and to seize upon the person of Antonio Perez, who was the Secretary of the King, our master, in whatsoever place he may be found, were it even a church, a

monastery, or any other spot, however holy, fortified, or privileged ; and that after having so seized upon him, you should, with all safety and precaution, conduct him to the prisons of this Holy Office, and deliver him to the Alcaide, who has orders to receive him from your hands in the presence of one of the *Notarios del Secreto*.

"Given at the Royal Palace of the Aljaferia, and signed—Molina de Medrano, Hurtado de Mendoza, and Morejon."

"You see, madam," continued Don Diego, addressing the Condesa, "how absolute is the authority claimed, and very properly claimed, by the delegates of the Sacred Tribunal?"

"I do," replied Doña Elvira, "and am anxious to know how far such claims were recognised by the Aragonese authorities."

"Well, madam, this Herrera, or whatever the alguacil's name was, proceeded, with eight attendants of the Inquisition, to the prison of the Manifestados, but the delivery of Perez was refused in the name of the National Fueros. Thereupon the Inquisitors drew up this second order, more peremptory still than the first, and addressed to the lieutenants of the grand judge himself, threatening them with excommunication should the prisoner not be forthcoming in three hours. Now, it would seem

suaded implicitly to follow the King's injunctions. He, therefore, after consulting his lieutenants, sent the Governor of the Manifestados to the Senor Perez, who was transferred at once from his prison to Aljaferia."

"And it was upon this that the king, as the stones were wont to do in Aljaferia, ever the National Fueros were. You must excuse me, Señor de Maldonado; you know that my mother's Araucanian will sometimes betray itself in me when great questions are discussed."

"We know that, indeed, Señor de Maldonado, and rejoice to think that we have you in custody here," answered Maldonado, smiling. "The king's will is the law."

had occurred, assembled the people in great numbers with the old cries of 'Contra Fuero,' 'Ayuda a la Libertad,' and so forth. Soon, the whole town was in arms, and a numerous band of insurgents, with several of the leading nobles at their head, attacked the house of the Marques d'Almenara. The justicia mayor, Don Juan de la Nuza, in vain appeared, with all his assessors, and attempted to harangue the mob; the house was broken into, and the royal commissioner obliged to retire under the escort of the chief justice and his officers."

"I thought it was then that he was attacked," interposed the Governor.

"No, Señor," replied Maldonado; "inasmuch as I can collect from our information, the procession moved on in safety as far as the Church of La Seu, according to the solemn pledges repeatedly given by the leaders of the rebellion to the justicia mayor. There, however, with the usual good faith observed in such cases, the cries of 'Muera, muera,' were raised, and the Marques d'Almenara was violently assaulted——"

"But not injured, I trust?" anxiously inquired the Condesa.

"The wounds are so serious, madam, that no hope of his recovery is entertained."

"That is awful, indeed," resumed Doña Elvira.

"Yet no very unusual consequence of a popular outbreak, Señora," observed Don Diego. "In the meantime," continued he, "Perez was still at the Aljaferia, where, thanks to the firmness of my friend Medrano, who alone appears to have preserved his whole self-possession during these trying circumstances, no disposition whatsoever was testified to yield to the dictates of the multitude. Far be it from me to question either the valour or discretion displayed by the different authorities; but I would willingly submit to your excellency's superior judgment and knowledge of the locality, whether, if all parties had shown the resolution evinced by the ecclesiastical authorities, their prerogatives and those of the crown might not have been ultimately asserted?"

"Very possibly, Maldonado," answered the

veteran, "but still you must remember that your friends were safely ensconced behind the walls of their fortress, while the civil and military power had to contend, with what forces we do not exactly know, against a whole town in open insurrection."

"Very true, indeed, *Senor Conde*. At all events, however, *Medrano* assures me in his letter that he did not yield until he had received a positive and written injunction to that effect, not only from *Don Gaime Ximeno*, the Viceroy, but also from the Archbishop himself."

"So *Perez* was then set at liberty?" inquired the *Condesa*.

"Not so, madam; but he was delivered again, with his fellow-prisoner *Mayorini*, into the hands of the Viceroy and the *Condes d'Aranda* and *de Morata*, to be by them detained in safety in the prisons of the kingdom, and still held at the disposition of any competent tribunal. There is no disguising the fact, however, that the popular triumph is complete, and that every object for which the insurrection contended has been achieved."

"Well, but I must say," resumed the Condesa, "that however much I do deplore that most criminal attack upon the Royal Commissioner, this popular or rather this national object was nothing more than the vindication of one of the oldest Aragonese rights, the absolute jurisdiction over their own subjects, a right that has been as often asserted as attacked."

"You remember the old Latin proverb, Madam, '*respice finem*,'" observed Don Diego, thoughtfully; "in this, as in all matters, we must look to the ultimate result. We are told that the great Isabella would occasionally long for some outbreak in Aragon, which might give her a fair opportunity of establishing there, once for all, her paramount authority. I should esteem our present monarch neither less willing nor less able than his illustrious ancestress to maintain and to extend the prerogatives of the crown, and I have shrewd misgivings that this temporary triumph will be far from beneficial to the so-called liberties of the Aragonese."

"However that may be," rejoined the Conde, "we must endeavour to prevent any such victories being obtained over us—eh, Maldonado?"

"Unquestionably, Señor; and I should venture to suggest, with that view, the expediency of having everything prepared for the immediate proclamation of martial law throughout the principality should the slightest disturbance take place."

"No later than to-night, amigo, if you think proper," said the stern veteran.

"Nay, may it please your excellency," resumed Maldonado, "it were more in accordance with his majesty's probable intentions to wait for some provocation, however slight, on the popular side. My friend Moriz and I can nevertheless pass this night, or a portion of it, in drawing up all the necessary directions, both to the civil and military authorities, so that nothing but the date and the seal should be wanting whensoever you would think proper to issue your injunctions."

"I have no objection to that course," an-

swered the Governor. "And now, with respect to the bull-fight to-morrow, what think you, Maldonado?"

"It is desirable, I should say, Señor, that your excellency should attend in state."

"Undoubtedly, as far as we are concerned, but I was thinking of the Señore."

"Ah! I do not know what to reply on that head. The fate of the Marques d'Almenara is a new and sad warning of the excesses which the fury of the rabble may wantonly commit."

"It is indeed," exclaimed the Governor, "and I must put it to your own sense, Elvira, whether it be wise or rational to run such awful risks for so paltry an object?"

"Oh! do not appeal to my sense or judgment, Señor," cried the Condesa, imploringly: "you know that I have none; you have told me so a thousand times. My duty and my right is to accompany you to-morrow, and where you go, I must and I will go also."

"Then we shall see the corrida after all," exclaimed Sirena, joyfully clapping her hands: "I have actually been breathless with terror

during the last half hour, lest all these events should prevent our attending."

"What! and you too, you silly child," exclaimed the Governor: "this is madness indeed! I certainly will not take charge of two women."

"Why not, Señor?" said the Condesa, with her most fascinating smile. "We shall be so quiet, so inoffensive, besides being so very becomingly attired."

"It matters not," replied the Conde; "one is already one too many; but while there may be a reason, or rather a shadow of a pretext, for your appearing with me, Elvira, no such plea could be invoked to justify Sirena's imprudence."

"Well, querida," said the Condesa to her niece, "you hear the Governor's decision, and see that I am not responsible for it."

"It is very cruel indeed upon me," exclaimed Sirena, "and the more so that you appear to concur in it."

"Not entirely, my child; but still you must admit—first, that I have official duties to perform, from which you are exempt;—

secondly, that while the captain of the garrison will doubtless, as on former occasion be so kind as to attend upon me personally, see no cavalier of such rank and station he as becomingly to perform the same office I you."

"Oh! were that the only motive," replied Sirena, "I am sure that I could find some one who would not disdain to take charge of me."

The languishing eyes of the fair speaker undisguisedly sought those of Villafior, as she uttered this expectation, that he could not but exclaim in his turn:

"Indeed, Señora, I do presume that such might be found."

"If the Señor de Villafior is here alluding to himself," observed Doña Elvira, somewhat hastily, "perhaps he will do well to remember that, as we proceed in state to-morrow, I will have his appointed place and function in the Governor's suite."

"The Señor de Villafior, madam, does not he trusts, require to be reminded that I must not promise what he may not or cannot perform; and yet he ventures most humbly to

assure Doña Sirena that she need, in his neighbourhood, fear no peril which it may be in his power to avert. He therefore conceives, that the Señora Condesa must have some other reason than that which she has thought fit to express, for debarring from so great a pleasure one who cannot have an enemy in the world."

"What can you mean, Señor," retorted the Condesa, haughtily, "and what reasons could I have for assenting to his excellency's views, saving those which he has himself defined?"

"I do not presume to inquire, madam," coldly replied Villafior.

"Then I should be grateful if you would spare me your most groundless insinuations."

"Come, come, querida," interposed the Governor, smiling, "you were the aggressor, as you generally are, and the Señor Moriz was only defending himself."

"Well, Señor, but he has no right to defend himself by such unfair and covert reflections upon me."

"Perhaps, I may be permitted to observe," said the subtle Maldonado, "that all my friend and colleague Moriz can have intended

to imply was, that the Señora Condesa is more solicitous about Doña Sirena's complexion than about her own."

"Bravo, Diego," exclaimed the Conde, "you are the true peace-maker. Now, I should recommend you to remove Villafior beyond the range of my Elvira's retorts, who, you may be sure, will always end by carrying the day. It were as well, while we have nothing else on hand, to get those orders respecting the proclamation of martial law drawn up at once, and prepared for signature. You must not, however, Señor Moriz, in the midst of all this copying, forget the equerry department: remember, that to-morrow I reckon upon our cavalcade showing in its bravest array, and, in every respect, like last year."

"But with respect to the escort, Señor Conde?"

"Did not you hear the Governor say that everything was to be on the same footing as last year," impatiently replied the Condesa, as she retired from the room with her husband.

## CHAPTER XIV.

SHOULD it ever be your fate, gentle reader, to meet with disappointment, which we fervently trust will not be the case as you peruse these pages, perhaps it may be some consolation for you to learn, that such occurrences are not strictly confined to the present age, but that they would also befall our predecessors of the sixteenth century. We should be at a loss, however, to point to many circumstances upon record much more untoward than that which the veteran Conde de Sierra Dorada had too just cause to deplore, when finding himself seized, on the ensuing morning, with an attack of sciatica, so violent and unrelent-

ing, as to render it totally impossible for him to raise himself in his couch, still less to leave it. Numerous and agonizing were his efforts and his struggles to escape from the ruthless fiend, which confined him in his grasp as within an iron vice; many and loud were his exclamations, savouring, we much fear, more of military energy than of pious resignation: it was of no avail, he was for the time an absolute cripple.

And now the contingency long foreseen by the aspiring Maldonado, was at hand. Aragon was in arms; throughout the province of Catalonia the strongest sympathy with the insurrection was openly expressed; from every officer of the crown, whether judicial, civil, or military, the most alarming reports, or the most urgent demands for fresh instructions were pouring in, yet so thoroughly disabled was the representative of the King, that he was constrained to delegate to the humble, the meek, the lowly Diego, all his vested authority, reserving merely to himself the empty show of the required signature, that he might thus at least dissemble from t

Court the whole extent of his present helplessness. Great, however, as was the new responsibility thus apparently cast upon him, the sagacious secretary was too well prepared, we might almost say, too well practised, to evince either the least concern or the slightest change in his habitual demeanour; and though his continual allusion to his patron's name and behest was now no longer a mere form, but an actual fallacy, the all-deciding, the all-providing, the all-commanding Maldonado, was still the same unassuming and unaltered personage.

It was not precisely the same with the fair Doña Elvira; while her grief on beholding her husband's sufferings both bodily and mental was intense and unrestrained, her own high spirit most undisguisedly rose with the emergency. No longer were the pleasures of the bull-fight or the pomp of the pageantry remembered; one thought, one feeling, entirely absorbed every other—how was the honour of the gallant veteran, whose name she bore, most fitly to be upheld? In vain did every official personage who approached her in the

course of the morning represent to her, ~~th~~<sup>at</sup> in the actual uncertainty with respect to ~~th~~<sup>e</sup> condition of the popular mind, it would be fa~~r~~ more judicious for her not to appear in publi~~c~~ on that day; she indignantly replied to al~~l~~ such advice, that she was now more determined~~ly~~ than ever to show herself at the head of the usual state procession, and that the graver the circumstances, the more necessary it was that the absence of the Captain-General should be as little noticed as possible.

“In short, Señor de Villafior,” said she, at length, “since it particularly concerns you, once for all, you have my positive injunctions to prepare everything exactly on the same footing as last year. At noon precisely I shall start from hence with whomsoever is willing to accompany me, saving, of course, the Señor de Maldonado, whose continued presence here is indispensable for the comfort of the Captain-General, and may besides be required for other motives.”

“Is this your final and irrevocable determination, Tia querida?” insidiously inquired Doña Sirena.

"It is, child. And are you too attempting to thwart me?" was the impatient reply.

"No, indeed, Señora; I only wish to observe that I am now formally invited by yourself to attend upon you, and that I shall not fail to obey."

The youthful aunt could not forbear smiling at this logical conclusion, and then said:—

"As I am bound not to contradict myself, I suppose that I must accept you as my esquire. Go, therefore, and look your last at the face which God has given you, ere it be for ever scarred by these rebels, about whom every one is talking, though none has seen them, or, as I humbly think, will see them to-day."

At the appointed hour of noon, the Condesa, agreeably to her intimation, appeared in the vestibule of the palace, fully and most gorgeously equipped for the gay cavalcade. She there found the Señor de Villafior in attendance, and ready, as was his duty and privilege, to assist her in mounting upon her richly-caparisoned jennet. As he bent one knee to the earth to perform this office, his doublet slightly

opened, and her penetrating glance discerned under it the cunningly-wrought shirt of mail the gift of the prudent Bolea, which our hero thus wore for the first time.

"I see that you are well armed for the occasion, Señor," said she, in a tone which seemed to testify that she had not entirely forgotten certain passages of the night before.

Moriz, however, was determined not to be betrayed again into any similar warfare, and he merely answered, with a smile:—

"My page, madam, having been particularly ominous in his forebodings of this morning, I have thought it right to take this and a few other precautions."

"Pray, am I to reckon among these," said the Condesa, now looking more attentively around her, "this extraordinary military array which I behold?"

"Why, yes, madam. The captain of the garrison has concurred with Maldonado and me in thinking that the six troops under his orders might as well attend to escort your excellency, and we humbly trust that you will approve."

"But I do not approve at all," exclaimed the wayward Condesa. "Did I not positively and clearly say that we were to start as we did last year."

"Yes, madam."

"And did the Captain-General ever, on that occasion or on any other, order anything more than the usual guard of honour to accompany him?"

"No, Señora. But then——"

"But then, what?" impatiently cried the Condesa. "You see that I am half wild already with this morning's annoyances, and you seem all leagued together still further to cross my wishes in every matter. Don Balthazar Quiroga," continued she, calling to the captain of the garrison, "I particularly insist upon not appearing at the head of this army of yours. Take our usual escort, with a few more men if you think it absolutely necessary; but, for heaven's sake, do not let us provoke an inoffensive population, merely bent, as I fully believe, upon their own harmless amusement, by this untimely display of our apprehensions and of our distrust. The Señor

Corregidor, who is there, can inform you, am sure, as he told me not half an hour since that he has received no report as yet which could give any countenance to such an armament."

Thus appealed to, the gallant captain imparted at once to his lieutenant this new order but soon afterwards, approaching Villafior, he whispered to him—

"I have desired the principal body of our men to hold back until we are fairly started, and then to move smartly on towards the arena by the Calle del Sol, while we follow the Calle Mayor. The two streets are parallel and intersected several times, so that, should we be molested in any way, assistance will be speedily procured."

In the meantime, the lovely Condesa had moved on, and the glittering cavalcade which surrounded her had fast fallen into its appointed array. In the first rank, and preceded merely by the advanced guard of the detachment, rode Doña Elvira and her niece, having Quiroga on their right, and Villafior, with the Corregidor, on their left. Then

followed a brave assemblage of inferior officials, of equerries, of pages, and of mounted lackeys, all in their fairest attire or in their state liveries, while, according to its orders, the well-armed escort hung back somewhat in the rear. At first, the few groups of idlers, which were standing in the neighbourhood of the palace, welcomed the noble pageant with the most clamorous testimonies of respect and of approbation. Indeed, so flattering were many of the exclamations which reached the Condesa's ear, that the frown soon vanished from her brow, and she could not forbear observing, with a smile and even with a slight blush, to her neighbours, that it was fortunate perhaps, after all, that the Conde was not present.

The distance between the palace and the amphitheatre was somewhat less than an English mile, and nearly half the progress was accomplished without the slightest disagreeable occurrence. It then might have become apparent to a close observer, that the denser crowd which lined the Calle Mayor no longer manifested the eager and deferential curiosity which had been universally evinced at the outset.

Dark visages might be seen gazing, with cynical indifference or with a malignant scorn upon the fair forms of the Castilian beauties, while the undoffed sombrero refused its accustomed homage. Soon, the hostile remark and the ribald jest were stealthily proffered, and then so audibly repeated and circulated as to reach those ears which they were most likely to wound. Then might be heard, though uttered as yet secretly and in the background, the first ominous cries of "Long live the Aragonese!" "Perez for ever!" "Down with the Salt duties!" until, aroused at length by these kindred voices, the gaunt figure of Sedition stood full across the path of the festive train.

Though Doña Elvira had certainly not been the last to notice the earlier symptoms of the impending outbreak, she had long struggled to conceal, under an outward semblance of unconcern or of disdain, her growing consciousness of the approaching peril; but had she been forewarned by no other indication, the dark frown of the sturdy Quiroga, and the fast kindling eye of Villafior, might have informed her that some serious incidents were at hand.

Still, neither of the gallant cavaliers appeared in any way anxious to precipitate the course of events by any act of their own, and it was not until the first rebellious murmurings had risen into one continuous roar of insult and defiance, that our hero reined in his horse, so as to draw near to the captain in command, without passing in front of the noble ladies under their charge.

"Should not we do well, Quiroga," whispered he, "to double the advanced guard, to draw the escort closer around us, and then somewhat to mend our pace?"

The captain having assented, the required command was given and promptly obeyed, after which Villafior calmly resumed his former place, not denying himself withal the satisfaction of striking with his riding-rod the cap from off the head of a youth who, as he conceived, was gazing too earnestly upon the face of one of the Señore—which, gentle reader, I leave you to determine.

The procession now advanced more rapidly and in more military guise, but the attitude of the thickening crowd, while decidedly more

respectful, grew also more markedly hostile. The regiment, of which the guard of honour was composed, and which bore the name of its noble colonel, the Duque d'Ossuña, was, perhaps not undeservedly, much disliked at Barcelona, and its soldiers being generally well disposed to resent any affront to their corps on the part of the citizens, the advanced guard soon found themselves engaged in direct and individual altercation with the foremost among the mob. Swords were promptly resorted to on one side, staves, knives, and sundry missiles on the other, until the conflict became both serious and general. Quiroga now moved forward to open a passage in person, but scarcely had he left the Condesa's side, when a huge stone, cast from the roof of an adjoining house, felled him to the ground.

"Gracious heaven, this is awful indeed!" cried Doña Elvira, as she beheld the sad occurrence, and heard the exulting shouts with which it was hailed by the populace. "What shall we do, Señor de Villafior? Had we not better return to the palace?"

"That is impossible now," responded Moriz,

“the rascaille mob is pressing hard upon our rear, and our retreat is already cut off. For God’s sake, bear up, noble lady, until we reach the corner of yonder street before us. We shall then, I trust, be within sight and within call of our succours.”

Having uttered these words, Villafior drew his sword, and making one terrible example among the most conspicuous of the rioters, again urged the Condesa to advance; but while his eye had been averted, a ferocious peasant had approached her, and had driven unobserved his long clasp knife full into the chest of her palfrey. The noble animal staggered under the felon stroke, tottered on a pace or two, and was sinking fast, when a cry of anguish from its gentle burden called Moriz’s attention to this new catastrophe.

“Fear nothing, madam,” whispered he, as, every other consideration being merged in the care for her safety, he disengaged her by main force from her falling steed, and, still bearing her in his arms, placed her light and fragile form before him upon his saddle. Having secured her there, he shouted in a loud voice :

“Cut and kill, Ossuñas; Ossuñas, to the rescue of the Condesa!” and being soon closely surrounded by half a dozen soldiers, he set spurs to his horse, opened his way through the crowd, and reached in safety the appointed corner of the neighbouring street. There he immediately beheld, at the other corner, and within a hundred yards, the expected patrol of the faithful d'Ossuñas, who shortly gathered around him in sufficient numbers to put an end to all peril. Being determined, however, to incur no further risk, he detached one body to the help of those whom he had been constrained to leave behind, and proceeded, at a rapid pace and with a numerous escort, towards the arena, no longer by the fatal Calle Mayor, but by the Calle del Sol, where no fresh interruption awaited them.

When he thus approached, in comparative safety, the outer precincts of the arena, our hero began to reflect, with some disquietude, upon the singular guise in which the proud and illustrious Condesa de Sierra Dorada was accomplishing her state progress. Fortunately, however, the Calle del Sol conducted

merely to one of the side entrances of the amphitheatre, round which very few persons were assembled, most of the spectators having already assumed their places within, or taken up some station which would enable them to command a view of the expected procession through the Calle Mayor. Villafior was thus enabled, with the assistance of the soldiers who still surrounded him, to dismount, and almost unperceived, to place his gentle charge upon the ground. She had by this time so far regained her affrighted senses as pretty clearly to discern where she was, but yet how pale was still her brow, how anxious her glance, how tremulous her arm, as it clung to her preserver for support and assistance.

"All danger is over now," whispered Moriz. "If you will but step into this passage here, behind the lower gallery, I can take care that no one shall disturb you."

"Oh, yes!" muttered she; "two minutes only to recover from the awful impression of what we have just seen."

In an instant, several troopers having left their horses to follow Villafior's directions, a

chair and a glass of water were procured, and a portion of the passage cleared and guarded by a sufficient number of sentries. There Doña Elvira remained for a few short moments, her head buried in her slender hands, that she might still further recal her wandering thoughts; she then arose, and having ascertained that the same passage would lead her to the state pavilion, which she was destined to occupy, she proceeded there at once, with a firmer step, though still supported by Villafior.

In the meanwhile, the sinister reports of the incidents which we have just related had been borne with their usual rapidity, and also with their accustomed exaggeration, to the scene of the forthcoming festivities. Many, indeed, most confidently affirmed already, that the Captain-General, his wife, and a considerable number of his attendants, had been murdered by the mob, when suddenly, a stir having been observed in the highly decorated stand reserved for the Governor and his suite, Doña Elvira herself was seen to enter. A murmur of intense satisfaction first run

through the assembled crowd, and then the whole audience arose, and, with one unanimous roar of applause, greeted the appearance of the lovely representative of the crown.

“All this I owe to you, Señor de Villafior,” softly whispered the Condesa, when she had gracefully acknowledged this heart-felt welcome; “you have this day preserved life and honour; but, for Heaven’s sake, where is Sirena?”

Our hero was constrained to answer that he had not yet had time to inquire.

“Santa Maria!” exclaimed Doña Elvira, in undisguised surprise and terror; “am I to believe that you have not given her welfare a thought in this awful emergency? I felt confident that she must be safe when I saw you at my side. Oh, you recreant knight,” added she, in a lower tone, “how can you thus have abandoned your lady love?”

“Indeed, madam,” replied Moriz, “I am guilty of no such treason, for never did hand and heart act together as mine have to-day. I can have no doubt but that the succours which I immediately sent on to the

relief of our party will have been amply sufficient——”

“But I cannot rest for a moment more here upon this mere supposition,” eagerly interrupted the Condesa. “Nothing but the state of utter distraction from which I am barely recovered yet, could excuse my having thus forgotten that poor girl and so many faithful friends.”

With these words Doña Elvira hastily arose, and, still preceding Villafior, moved towards the state entrance of the amphitheatre, but there she was met by the grateful intelligence that Doña Sirena and the remainder of the suite were even now alighting from their horses under the safe guidance of nearly the whole body of the d'Ossuñas. Warm indeed were the greetings exchanged between the youthful relatives, who could now mingle their tears of gratitude and joy; and greatly was their satisfaction increased when they were informed, soon afterwards, that the brave Quiroga's wound, though severe, was not considered dangerous. The arrival of Doña Sirena and her followers was

the signal of another outburst of applause from the spectators, who, comprising as they did all that was most illustrious and respectable in Barcelona, were particularly anxious to mark how earnestly they reprobated the base conduct of the rabble. The first bull was then introduced, and the national sport proceeded with all its accustomed spirit and circumstance.

Our space forbids us here to enlarge upon the varied incidents of this corrida, which, as it cost the lives of sixteen novillos, twelve horses, and two toreadors, besides innumerable wounds and gashes, was esteemed a very fair day's entertainment, even by the most fastidious. We must add, however, that the high-spirited Condesa was no less enthusiastically greeted upon her departure than at her first appearance; and that while she had the prudence not to decline, during her return to the palace, a strong escort of the d'Ossuñas, she encountered no further testimonies of hostility or of disrespect.

## CHAPTER XV.

WHEN alighting from the fresh steed which, by the directions of Villafior, had been sent for, to bear her home, Doña Elvira traversed the stately vestibule of her palace, she there encountered Maldonado, who was hastening to meet her, and the rapturous joy which beamed in his dark eye when he saw her again standing before him in safety would doubtless have been remarked even by a less attentive and more disinterested spectator than Moriz. Ere he uttered a word, Don Diego seized the Condesa's hand, and bore it more than once to his lips; he then exclaimed, with an earnestness of tone which was peculiar to him,—

“Heaven be praised, madam, for this hour of unspeakable joy!”

“You have been rather alarmed here, I fear, upon my account,” replied she, “and not without a cause. God only knows where and what I should have been by this time were it not for the marvellous presence of mind and courage of the Señor de Villafior.”

Maldonado here cast upon his colleague one glance of the intensest scrutiny, and then said, with his usual self-possession,—

“No one who knows my friend Moriz could be surprised that he should have displayed such qualities in any emergency; but all Spain owes him to-day a debt of gratitude which will not easily be paid.”

“I suppose that I must accept the compliment,” answered the Condesa; “and now, pray tell me, Señor de Maldonado, how far the Governor has been apprised of our adventures this morning?”

“I have alluded as slightly as possible, madam, to the perils which you have incurred, thinking it would be as well that he should hear the recital from your own lips, when he

again had seen you at his side and completely recovered from the shock, as we trust are?"

"Oh, entirely," responded the Conde; "and personally I have nothing to deplore but saving the death of my beloved Nouredine and the loss of my Arabian bracelet, which, as you know, I value so much."

"What, that golden circlet, madam, with its talismanic inscription?"

"Ah! you may laugh at my superstition, Señor de Maldonado, but during more than one generation we have held in the family that the loss or recovery of that mystic ornament is the signal for woe or for weal to the daughter of the Haros."

"Then it must be recovered at any price, madam," exclaimed both Diego and Mariana together; "and we shall lose no time in taking such measures as must insure speedy restitution."

Doña Elvira had now reached the entrance of the veteran Conde's apartment, where her happiness in again beholding her was in some wise allayed by the accounts she gave him

the dangers from which she had been preserved. Her animated narrative of all she had undergone, during which an ample tribute to Villafior's devotion was not forgotten, was interesting in the extreme; but you will, gentle reader, both understand and excuse our not reproducing it, when we freely admit that our own, which you have lately perused, would suffer greatly by the comparison. We will therefore merely say that every circumstance and detail having been freely discussed, and the Governor's heartfelt thanks having been expressed to our hero in the most gratifying terms, other subjects were finally introduced.

"Did the insurrection spread much beyond the Calle Mayor?" inquired Moriz of Maldonado.

"I understand that seditious cries respecting Antonio Perez and the salt-tax were raised in several directions, but we were enabled to take such measures as have put a speedy stop to these popular recreations."

"Have you succeeded in arresting and identifying some of the rioters?"

"About a hundred of the most conspicuous," calmly replied Maldonado, "have already been tried and sentenced, though only three executions have as yet taken place."

"Indeed!" cried Moriz and the Condesa in extreme surprise; "arrested, convicted, and executed within the space of four hours!"

"Yes, madam; nor do I conceive that we—that his excellency, has shown any undue precipitation. Upon the very first rumour of the insurrection, a state of siege was proclaimed, and a military tribunal formed among the officers of the garrison. Every man arrested, either by the d'Ossuña regiment, or by the well-disposed citizens, was condemned upon their evidence, and is now awaiting his majesty's pleasure in the closest confinement, with the exception of the three above mentioned. These having been seized as they were attempting to murder Don Balthazar Quiroga, while he lay senseless on the ground, were, by his excellency's commands, immediately beheaded."

"Who has been beheaded, do you say,

Maldonado?" muttered the Governor, who had lately fallen back again upon his couch in a fresh paroxysm of suffering.

"I was informing the Señora Condesa," calmly resumed Maldonado, "that three miscreants were so executed, by your excellency's order, for having attempted to stab the captain of the garrison."

"By my orders, Maldonado?"

"Yes, may it please your excellency: the warrant was the last paper but one which you signed this afternoon."

"Indeed; I have signed so many to-day, that I cannot well remember what their purport was. But I have no doubt it was all perfectly correct."

Such was about the state both of mental and bodily prostration in which the gallant Conde de Sierra Dorada remained for nearly three weeks, during which time Maldonado did not cease to despatch, in his name, all the complicated business of the principality, with an energy, a prudence, and a foresight, which astonished all who beheld him. We have reason to presume, however, that he was not

quite so guarded in concealing the prominent part which he was taking, when he wrote to Madrid, as when he was issuing his directions at Barcelona; for, though in the official answers of the court the name of the Captain-General was always mentioned, Don Diego received himself no less than three letters from the Secretary Moura, conveying [to him personally the approbation of the government for his exertions; and, in one case, even the satisfaction of the King himself. But we must now return to our hero's more private adventures.

About ten days had elapsed since that of the corrida, when, one afternoon, Villafior was informed by his page that a peasant girl from a neighbouring village desired to speak with him. He directed that she should be immediately admitted, and he beheld a young woman, whose dark and sun-burnt features were enlivened by a very prepossessing expression. No sooner was she alone with the gallant equerry, than she produced, from a kerchief of coarse but very white linen, a bracelet, which

he recognised at once as being that which the Condesa had so lately lost.

"How did you come by this article, querida?" inquired he.

"May it please your excellency," replied the blushing aldeana, "it was presented to me, a few days since, by a young man."

"Your brother, I presume?"

"No, Señor," answered she, smiling; "not my brother, but a relative of mine."

"Oh! I understand," resumed our hero: "and do you know how he came by it himself?"

"He bought it for an escudo from a town porter, on the day of the corrida."

"And why have you brought it to me, manola?"

"Because I understand, Señor, that the Señora Condesa Gobernadora lost one on the day of the bull-fight, and I thought this might be the one."

"Were you aware that a reward had been offered for it?"

"A reward in money? No, Señor; nor

would I claim or accept any such; though there is one thing, I own, that I should much desire."

"And what may that be, amiga? Do not be afraid to tell me."

"I should so like, if the bracelet does belong to the Señora Condesa, to have the honour of presenting it to her myself."

Our hero could scarcely forbear smiling again at the very earnest tone in which this humble request was proffered.

"Well, we must see how that can be accomplished," said he. "Let me know what your name is?"

"Anita Serral, may it please your excellency."

"Then wait here, Anita, until I can ascertain whether the Señora Condesa is now at leisure to receive you."

With this view Villafior descended to the apartment of Doña Elvira, and having been told by the usher in waiting that she was alone, he proceeded to the door of her innermost sitting-room; but ere he reached it, he could behold, through the windows of the

withdrawing-room which he was traversing. Maldonado moving, with his usual slow and stealthy step, down the marble flight which conducted from thence to the stately gardens of the palacio. The recollections which this coincidence evoked might have induced him to have paused for a few moments ere he broke upon the Condesa's solitude; but so eager was he to impart the joyful intelligence which he was bearing, that he could not withstand knocking at once, and entering so soon as the gentle response from within reached his ear. The sight he then beheld was such, however, as to dispel, for the time, all remembrance either of Anita Serral or of the recovered treasure.

The Condesa had evidently just started up, either from her divan, or perhaps from the floor itself; but the terror which her countenance still revealed at our hero's unexpected approach, could not banish the expression of unimaginable anguish which was stamped upon every feature of her beauteous face. This time it was in vain to attempt alike deception or concealment; some mysterious and awful

shock had evidently overpowered all her wonted firmness; and when she fell back upon her estrada, she seemed as lifeless as either of the marble statues which upheld the extremities of its gorgeous hangings.

Villafior remained for a second as one thunderstricken; then, every generous feeling of his chivalrous youth swelling in his breast and rushing to his lips, he advanced, and kneeling at the feet of the desolate beauty, wildly seized her unresisting hand, and exclaimed, in a low and tremulous voice:—

“It has been my blessed fate, madam, to hear you once whisper to me that I had saved honour and life. When will you tell me how I can redeem happiness also?”

“Alas! Señor,” muttered she, softly, “~~it~~<sup>it</sup> has long since fled, far, far beyond the reach of your noblest endeavour.”

“Say not so, gentle lady; oh! say not so who on earth, or in heaven, is to smile if you may not? I need no informant, no confession, no confidence now. Some awful spell has been wrought around you; what, I may not guess; but by whom, I can well see; and he shall

disclose all to me, were it with the last breath of mortal life that he shall ever draw."

"No, no, Señor de Villafior," cried the Condesa, starting up in a fresh agony of terror; "that were folly, indeed, and sure destruction to both of us. Arise, for God's sake, arise, and never give another thought to what you have this day beheld."

"That is impossible, madam, absolutely impossible," answered Villafior. "No Castilian caballero could remain a mere indifferent spectator of such sufferings as I see you here silently enduring."

"There is no remedy, Señor de Villafior, and no hope. I am in his power for ever."

"Gracious heaven! what can you mean, noble lady?"

"Nothing, nothing," interrupted she, in utter distraction. "Leave me, for God's sake, Señor de Villafior; it is no knightly part thus to wring from the faint gasping of a broken heart what the mind and the will may not reveal."

"Very well, madam, I obey," replied Villafior, calmly, and he slowly retired towards the

Ere he reached it, the Condesa sprang forward, and wildly grasping his arm, exclaimed

"You are going to him,—you are going Maldonado?"

"I am, madam."

"Then Santa Maria have mercy upon me," cried she, falling upon her knees. "He will suppose that I have betrayed him, and that his revenge will know no bounds. Oh! it too awful to think of! Why did you save me the other day from that happy and speedy death?"—and, in the agony of her despair she clasped her hands over her dishevelled brow.

"Excuse me, noble lady," said our hero much moved; "but such weakness is unworthy of you, and quite foreign to your exalted nature. You surely cannot conceive what the energy of one true heart may accomplish, or you would not thus give way. If Maldonado possesses this power and this inclination to injure you, he must be compelled at once to relinquish both, or his own traitorous life shall pay the forfeit."

"Oh! you do not know him," eagerly re

sumed the Condesa: "you cannot fathom the depths of his perfidy. He will never draw sword against such as you."

"It matters not, madam: his fate will be the less honourable, but not the less sure, should he persist in braving it."

"That were worse than all," cried the unfortunate Condesa. "The case has long since been provided for, and his death would be my surest ruin. Gladly indeed would I trust you, Señor de Villafior, my noble, my generous preserver—but alas! you could only sacrifice yourself without saving me. And then," added she, attempting to smile, "what would poor Sirena say?"

"Madam, it is cruel thus to jest when you so well know whose my heart is, and has been, since the first hour. But it matters not; and you have doubtless your own reasons for preferring your present intercourse with such as Maldonado to the honest devotion of a true caballero."

There was a slight tinge of irony, and almost of contempt, in the tone of the youthful speaker as he uttered these words, which might

have roused a far lowlier pride than that of Doña Elvira.

"You cannot mean what you seem to insinuate," said she, now partially restored to her usual demeanour, "and you know that you do not think it. Señor de Villafior, I would not requite your generous service, and still more generous offers, by even the slightest appearance of distrust; but tell me, are you indeed prepared to adventure, perhaps to sacrifice, all for one who may grant nothing in exchange, not even one word of hope?"

"Everything, madam, everything that I can possess or conceive," cried the enraptured Moriz, again falling at her feet—"even though one smile of satisfaction were denied to my utmost success, or one tear of pity to my early grave."

"Then I may own," resumed Doña Elvira, "that I have often, long, long ere this day, looked upon you as my destined champion, as my appointed deliverer. Were it otherwise, why should heaven have allowed you thus ever to be at my side in the hour of my utmost need. Perhaps, indeed, I could not have borne all that I have been made to endure until this

**awful evening, had I thought that I might have addressed to you sooner the appeal which you have just so nobly answered."**

**"Alas! madam, how can such a doubt have arisen in your mind?"**

**"How, Señor de Villafior? Are you quite unconscious of ever having openly, and in my very presence, laid at the feet of another that homage which you would now have me believe was reserved for me alone? Do you think that we can intrust what is dearer to us than life itself, to those whose heart is at the mercy of every soft smile, and every languishing glance?"**

**"Nay, madam, if I have somewhat appeared to deserve your mistrust upon this head, you must have seen, you must have felt that it was in the utter distraction and phrenzy of despair that I yielded elsewhere to that sympathy of which your averted eye would so inflexibly refuse the slightest earnest. Oh! could you but have read in that rejected heart, you would have known throughout how blithely it would have abandoned every imaginable treasure for one look of your heavenly eyes."**

**"Ah! we must pause there, Señor de Villa-**

flor," exclaimed the Condesa, though in a voice which betrayed neither displeasure nor resentment; "you are now vindicating yourself overmuch, and with such headlong zeal as almost to criminate yourself upon another charge. Remember that I accept you as a champion, but not as a suitor."

As she thus spoke, the fascinating Doña Elvira's eyes fell, accidentally, we have no doubt, upon one of the large Venetian pier-glasses which decorated her sitting-room, and, observing her dishevelled condition, she hastily added:

"You really must excuse me for a moment, Señor de Villafior, for were any one but you to see me thus, he would certainly think that my sorrows had actually destroyed my reason."

Moriz watched her as, with inimitable grace, she retired towards her innermost apartment; and when the door had closed upon her, when none was at hand to behold him, he fell upon his knees and pressed his lips, how often we cannot reckon, to the imaginary traces of her light footsteps upon the marble flooring. Nor did he arise, devout son of the church as he

was, without pouring forth his most enraptured thanks to the holy Virgin, and to his patron saint, by whose intercession, as he conceived, this blissful consummation of all his long-cherished and wildest hopes had been granted.

END OF VOL. I.



1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses.

2. The second part of the document is a list of names and addresses.



# LOVE AND AMBITION.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "ROCKINGHAM."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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we should long remain thus alone together. And yet I have that to state which it is painful indeed for any woman to avow, who regards the respect of others and her own as the greatest of human blessings."

She was here constrained to pause for a moment, in such visible embarrassment, that Villafior could not forbear observing:

"Excuse me, madam, but I trust that you will be satisfied to impart to me merely such general indications as will show me how I can serve you now, however obscure all former circumstances might remain to me?"

"No, no, Señor de Villafior," resumed she, earnestly, "I will place no such half confidence in you. You shall know all, and then you will clearly understand why I have hesitated, while I need not dread, to speak. First, however, I must claim your solemn oath—forgive me—your knightly word will suffice—that you will never reveal to mortal being, directly or indirectly, what I am now about to impart, and that you will besides be implicitly guided by me alone in all consequent steps which you may have to take."

The chivalrous pledge was duly given and received, after which the Condeso continued:

“ You already are aware that I am in Maldonado's power; but you have yet to learn how. He has in his possession,”—here the voice of the fair speaker faltered so completely as to become almost inaudible—“ he has in his possession a letter —— a letter of mine which, if shown —— to the Governor, or if even suspected by him, would suffice to consign me to a convent for life —— ”

As she concluded this half-whispered confession, the unfortunate Doña Elvira again burst into an agony of grief. Villafior gazed for an instant upon the loveliest image of womanly sorrow and helplessness which the eye of man could behold, and then gently said:

“ Is that the sole cause of your disquietude, Señora ? ”

The still weeping beauty nodded a silent assent.

“ Then, madam, you may rest satisfied,” calmly resumed Moriz, “ that within an hour this letter will have been restored to you.”

“ Oh! you know him not, be assured

that you know him not," — anxiously exclaimed the desolate Condesa. "The fatal original is in safety, where, I have never been able to trace—but far, far away—you think that you would wring it from him by compulsion, but you are fearfully mistaken. No promise that you could extort from him would be kept; and were he to meet with a sudden and violent death, the letter would forthwith be forwarded and delivered to the Governor. Of this he has assured me more than twenty times, or ere now, even my weak hand perchance would have been raised to attempt that desperate remedy."

"I see that the matter requires some caution," thoughtfully responded Moriz; "but allow me to ask you, madam, have all your endeavours failed to obtain the desired restitution?"

"They have, utterly, signally. I have threatened to the utmost extent my resentment and my contempt on one day; on the next, I have promised him the affection and the devotion of a sister; I have knelt, I have wept at his feet, but all in vain. Nothing would avail saving that absolute submission"

too infamous, too hideous even to be thought upon without a shudder——”

“ Ah, Santa Maria!” exclaimed the indignant Villafior, “ this is still deeper villany than I could have imagined.”

“ As yet I have been constrained not to drive his detested, his abhorred passion to desperation, for he has vowed, solemnly vowed, that the day when he must relinquish all hope, he will fly to the solace of revenge. Long have I endeavoured to endure his oppression; but, since the fatal corrida and the Governor’s illness, his insolence and importunity have passed all bounds; and, were it not for some mysterious protection from above, I should this very day, I believe, have defied his utmost vengeance, that at least I might never hear again the hated sound of his voice. I do not wonder, Señor de Villafior, that your generous nature should be thus confounded and dismayed.”

“ Indeed, madam, I never could have credited that a mortal being, while breathing the pure air of heaven, should thus have been capable of converting any testimony of a gentle lady’s

regard into a weapon against her peace, her happiness, her honour——”

As Villafior uttered these words, the Condesa fixed her beaming eyes upon him with such an expression of intense surprise, that he was himself obliged to pause in a state of astonishment as speechless as her own. At length, however, a slight smile of recollection brightened her anxious countenance, and she said—

“ Can anything which may have fallen from me have induced you to believe, Señor de Villafior, that he——, that Maldonado, has ever received any such testimony of regard from me?”

“ Excuse me, madam, but you spoke just now, or at least I understood you to speak, of a letter from you which he had in his possession——”

“ Yes,” interposed Doña Elvira; “ but you surely cannot conceive that it was addressed to him? I have yet more to tell—more to confess; but nothing, thank heaven! which could possibly approach the infamy of ever having said one word of encouragement to him, even when I most dreaded to drive him, as I should have

done, from my presence for ever. It is a sad tale which I have to relate, but you cannot assist me while you remain entirely unacquainted with it."

The afflicted Condesa again paused here, for a moment, as if uncertain how to commence her melancholy narrative; nor was it without a very evident struggle that she was enabled to recover the necessary amount of composure.

"You must know," she said at length, "that I lost my mother ere I was fourteen, and that I was brought up under my father's roof with my brother Luis, and with our cousin, Fernando de Haro, who was about his age. How, day by day, my sisterly affection for the latter grew into the warmest and most devoted attachment I need not relate; suffice it to say, that our faith had been mutually pledged a hundred times ere we were scarcely aware of the true meaning of our words, or of the true nature of our feelings. You have heard, no doubt, that my father was the younger son of a then numerous family. I was therefore to be almost portionless; so was my orphan cousin Fernando, and no sooner was our growing in-

Conde de Sierra Dorado  
from the first, was a stranger  
much as I have always  
the noble veteran whose  
now about three years since  
tortured from me: happily  
known in what intense rapture  
muttered at the altar, and

The ill-starred Doña Inez  
for a moment, as if wrapt  
in the same melancholy train  
of the irrevocable passion  
in the same melancholy train  
“We proceeded at once  
there I first saw Maldonado  
been recommended to the  
nor was I long in learning  
was to betray that, in one

ed! Within six months, my  
[ thought far away, appeared  
vening to upbraid me for my  
ery.—Oh! what a night that  
; almost senseless on the earth  
en, I heard him, the first, the  
reprobate me with every sterner  
etrayed, yet faithful affection.  
ritness how slight and guarded  
ation; but he remembered the  
I did, and being now free, de-  
ithstanding my most earnest  
o remain at Barcelona. Mal-  
long in discovering the object  
, with a perfidy which I neither  
counteract at the time, sought  
e confidence of an all-absorbing  
g passion.”

“subtle traitor,” exclaimed Villa-  
; breathless with anxiety.

nued the Condesa, “while my  
ing with its struggles to con-  
and to induce my poor impru-  
to renounce me and fly from me  
thless betrayer was urging him

to press his suit, and offering his own perfidious succour. By the same agency, I cannot doubt, though equally unknown to me as yet, the Conde's eyes were slowly and very partially opened to what was passing, and, after a few words of stern explanation with me, sufficient to show me how unrelenting would be his resentment and jealousy were they once truly awakened, my cousin was first advised, and then ordered to leave the town. His proud spirit having disdained and rejected all compliance, what awful tragedy might next have occurred, God only could tell, had I not myself interfered; and it was thus and then that the fatal letter was written——"

"Still, madam," inquired Villafior, with an earnestness which he could not all conceal, "you can have written nothing that did not testify how pure and holy were your intentions—how complete your self-sacrifice?"

"Alas!" replied she, "what I wrote, I know not exactly; but I much fear that, in the utter distraction of the moment, and bent upon insuring, at any price consistent with virtue and with honour, my cousin's obedience, I spoke of

the happy past, and of my unaltered and still faithful feelings, as none should speak who is no longer free. I have never since been enabled to read that letter, though I know that more than one copy of it is in existence; but I can well believe Maldonado, when he assures me, that were it ever to meet the Captain-General's eye, particularly under the auspices of my persecutor, it would easily bear that interpretation which would provoke on his part, and justify in the eyes of many, the dread penalty applied by the laws and customs of Spain to an erring spouse of my rank."

"Ay, noble lady, but you are none such, and can have naught to fear in common with them."

"Believe me, that I have everything to fear, and that I fear everything, saving the judgment of Heaven: few among those who have been most guilty were ever so imprudent as I."

"I see, at all events, that the letter must be recovered," said Villafior, thoughtfully; "were it only for your future peace of mind;

But I think you told me that it was not M Maldonado's actual possession?"

"This is what subsequently occurred. M cousin, ere he left Barcelona, made some allusion to it with his perfidious ally, to whom, as he conceived, he could intrust, more safely than to any written reply, his last and reluctant farewell to me. Maldonado, stung to the soul as he was by my contemptuous rejection of his own secret addresses, and by the now certain evidence of my preference for another, well saw to what account my own sad indiscretion might be turned. He therefore persuaded Fernando to accept the services of a creature of his own, as page and confidential follower,—this minion having instructions to use all endeavours to secure my letter; but as it eventually lay on the faithful heart to which it was addressed, the base mission could not be fulfilled until that heart had ceased to throb."

"Indeed, madam!" exclaimed Moriz, with all the sympathy which it was in his power to command; "can it be that Don Fernando, so young, so highly favoured, is already no more?"

"Yes, Señor de Villafior," replied the Countess.

desa, with tears again standing in her glowing eyes, "while the mean traitor is daily rising to distinction and to power, the true, the generous, the devoted, has been long since consigned to a bloody and obscure tomb on a foreign strand. Yet he died, as he had ever wished to perish, in the van and front of the onslaught."

"Thus to fall, and thus to be mourned for is a lot which we should envy rather than deplore," observed our hero, anxious above all to dissemble the feeling with which, as we must admit, he had internally hailed the intelligence that so dangerous a rival was no longer to be feared.

Doña Elvira shook her head mournfully, and then continued:

"How do you think the awful news was first broken to me? Will you believe me while I tell you that your soft-spoken friend appeared before me one day with a beam of triumph in his eye which I had never beheld there before. When I commanded him to cease his importunate jargon, and defied him again to brave my displeasure in that forbidden strain, he calmly

produced my fatal letter, and wantonly called upon me to mark the fell sword-thrust ~~that~~ traversed it, as well as the purple and darkening spots with which it was tinged. Methinks I still hear the baneful sneer in his voice ~~as~~ he muttered in my ear: 'These tell a tragic tale—but happily, madam, they have in no wise impaired the interest of the document. The passage respecting the Señor Conde particularly, is quite safe, and he will be enabled, if requisite, to read a very novel description of the sentiments which he can inspire.' ”

“For that alone he deserves to die, Señora,” interposed the impetuous Moriz. “How you can ever since have endured his presence, I am at a loss to conceive.”

“Ah! Señor de Villafior, necessity knows no rule. You may have heard that we are apt to be somewhat indulgent for the follies, and even the crimes which we are held to inspire: no such unworthy feeling can, I trust, be laid to my charge in this case; but believing, as I have believed, that I was utterly in Maldonado's power, I have done my best not to drive him to extremities. Remember, that

I have little experience, little knowledge of the world, for such a struggle with such an antagonist; and that I have had as yet no counsellor, no support. Indeed," added she, with a faint smile, "you may now understand why I felt and betrayed so much grief when I heard that my brother Luis was not to come to us; for, boy as he still is, he might yet perhaps have assisted or comforted me."

"I trust, gentle lady, to leave you no further cause of regret upon that head, if you will tell me how you think that I can serve you."

"At present we have but one thing to do," replied she; "that is, to ascertain where, and in whose hands my letter is deposited. I fully credit Maldonado when he assures me that it is neither in Barcelona, nor within my reach. Could we but discover where it is, we might hope to find some means of gaining possession of it; and were it once again in my hands, I should require no such desperate remedy as you were suggesting just now. One word to the Governor from me, when I may safely speak it, would insure sufficient retribution. You see, therefore, Señor de Vil-

lafflor, that neither now nor later will *your* trusty weapon be required in our just *cause*; far from it, you must, now more than *ever*, cultivate the friendship and confidence of *my* persecutor, so as to obtain, if possible, *the* essential information which we first require. Be careful, therefore, above all, lest anything which you have this day heard, should, in *the* slightest degree, alter your bearing towards him; for the same reason, my usual *de-*meanour, both with regard to you and to *him*, must remain unchanged; and thus, I *trust*, that, artful and clear-sighted though he be, he will not easily suspect what has this *day* passed between us. Now, however, I *fear*, that we must part."

"What, so soon, madam?"

"So soon, Señor?" resumed Doña Elvira. "What do you think that Maldonado *would* suppose, were he unfortunately to be aware of this prolonged interview? but we may *meet* again occasionally—not too often, that I *may* learn how far you have been both obedient and successful."

"You may reckon, at all events, *madam*,

at I fully comprehend the importance and wisdom of your directions, and that they shall sedulously followed."

"That is spoken like my true champion; ad now, farewell."

She extended her fair hand to our hero, who, wing fervently pressed it to his lips, retired in the apartment.

## CHAPTER XVII.

WE will not endeavour to describe the state of rapturous excitement into which this momentous interview had thrown the Señor de Villafior; the deep gratitude, the wild hopes, and the triumphant joy which swelled his heart, as he began to reflect upon the signal marks of confidence and of sympathy which he had received, and upon all that he had himself ventured to express. One sentiment, however, clearly prevailed over all others in that headlong conflict; a thrilling sense of the delicate and perilous mission which he had himself solicited, and of all-absorbing anxiety successfully to perform it. No sooner had he

awn from the Condesa's presence, than, as above all things to commune with his thoughts, recollections, and conjectures, sought the welcome solitude of the spacious rooms of the palace, there to meditate upon the best means of redeeming the chivalrous cause which he had so fervently and so confidently given.

But, in truth, it was no light task which he undertaken, thus to encounter and to defy the redoubted Maldonado; thus to stand across his path, as he was pursuing, not a trivial object of his restless caprice and

but the long-cherished consummation of his most daring and most deeply cherished designs. How was he to encompass the able and experienced traitor? how was

surprise, or extort from him some information respecting that fatal letter, upon the discovery of which all the Condesa's future success, and not hers only, now depended? More our hero considered this important; the more he felt convinced, that, as he had been for more than a year on terms of the greatest intimacy and apparent

confidence with Don Diego, he had obtained, yet, no insight whatsoever into what it more concerned him at present to know. Often Maldonado had conversed with him in general terms upon his expectations, his views, and his hopes; often as he had manifested betrayed the most unequivocal tokens of his soaring and ruthless ambition, he had sedulously avoided imparting to his younger colleague and associate any information respecting his family, or his more private friendships and acquaintances. That his political and personal connexions were numerous and extensive, no one could doubt who was thrown for any time in his society; but while he would freely communicate, in substance, the intelligence he received, he was ever most guarded in revealing its origin; and when a messenger was despatched from Barcelona, the whole of the cautious secretary's correspondence, written in the secret and unapproachable seclusion of his own room, and carefully enclosed and sealed with his own hand, was invariably delivered by him, at the last moment, into those of the courier himself.

"I see now," muttered Villafior, as he continued to pace, in deep abstraction, one of the loneliest alleys of the garden, "I see now, why that artful fox so warily conceals from every eye his mysterious despatch whenever a safe occasion offers for transmitting it to Madrid. More than one of its hidden enclosures is, doubtless, destined for that very party to whom he has confided the charge of poor Doña Elvira's letter, and, perchance, of many other proofs of his consummate treachery. As yet, unfortunately, I have never dreamed of raising the ill-omened veil; but the Condesa is right, we must proceed stealthily and prudently, until we have ascertained how and where the decisive blow is to be struck. I must now, more than ever, labour to captivate his confidence; and, while appearing intent only upon furthering our views of mutual preferment, strive to elicit from him some clue which may direct our steps through the maze which is opening before us. Surely, during the last year, I should have learned from him, both to dissemble and to divine; it is time for me to practise now

how I may penetrate his secret without betraying my own."

With this sapient conclusion, our hero slowly wended his way towards his own apartment; alas! there to learn that he had already been in some measure forestalled by his watchful and expert companion. No sooner did he reach his small waiting-room, than he there beheld, to his extreme astonishment, the peasant-girl, Anita Serral, whose visit he had completely forgotten amid the momentous circumstances to which it had given rise.

"Gracious heaven, querida, are you there still?" cried he. "I have been detained by matters of importance since I left you, and have not yet been able to deliver your message to the Condesa. Can I hope that you will forgive me for having been the involuntary cause of so long and tedious a delay?"

"Most readily, Senor," replied the smiling Anita; "the more so that I have found the time neither long nor dull."

"Indeed! Then your society must be as pleasant to yourself as it is to others?"

"Oh, it is not that, Señor, but such a

singular agreeable caballero has been up here two or three times inquiring after you——”

“A caballero inquiring after me?” exclaimed Moriz, in undisguised alarm. “And did you tell him where I was?”

“Assuredly, Señor; I informed him that you were gone to the Señora Gobernadora, and for what purpose.”

“He was here two or three times you say?” resumed Villafior, thoughtfully.

“He was, Señor, and seemed much surprised that you should have been so long delayed; but I trust, Señor, that I have given you no annoyance, and committed no indiscretion in telling him where I believed that you were?”

“Oh, no, of course not, Anita,” hastily replied our hero; “and I have no doubt but that you found his conversation wile away the time very agreeably.”

“It certainly did, Señor,” said the blushing Anita: “such singular language I never heard before. Assuredly, the Señor is not particularly —— in short, not very well favoured; but I don’t know how it is, when

he speaks, I fancy that I see quite another person."

"I suppose, Anita, he compared your eyes to the stars, your complexion to the hues of the setting sun, and so forth."

"Well," answered the laughing Anita, "it was something in that strain that he spoke; but it was his voice which struck me most. I don't know why it can have reminded me so much of the romances which I have heard sung on a Sunday evening by the Andalusian in the Calle Mayor."

"Beware of such music, Anita; it would steal away from you that which it is sometimes painful to have, but which it may be fatal to lose."

"If you mean my heart, Señor, I have it, I trust, in better keeping than thus lightly to part with it. Allow me, however, to remind you that I have been a long while absent from home."

"You are right, querida; and if you will accompany me below, we shall perhaps be enabled now to see the Señora Condesa for a few minutes."

When, in company with his fair charge, the Senor de Villafior reached Doña Elvira's withdrawing-room, he beheld her from thence walking alone in her garden, and hastened at once to join her there, preceding Anita Serral by a few steps. On beholding his approach, the anxious Condesa cast towards him one look of extreme dismay, and even when made aware of the pleasing intelligence which he conveyed, she merely whispered, with a melancholy smile, —

"I was always sure that I should be indebted to you, my true knight, for the fortunate recovery of my lost treasure."

"I only trust, madam, that it may be a happy omen," replied our enamoured hero.

"And you wish me to see and thank in person this honest aldeana?"

"She will be most deeply grateful, madam, for such a favour, the only guerdon which I believe she would receive."

Thus warned, the fair Condesa moved forward, and, with matchless grace, expressed her thanks to the lowly maiden as she received from her the much valued bracelet. Anita merely requested permission herself to fasten

the glittering circlet upon the slender arm of the high-born possessor, but the generous Doña Elvira could not rest satisfied with ~~so~~ poor an acknowledgment. She drew from ~~her~~ her bodice an emerald pin of some price, and ~~said,—~~

“You must bear this away with you, my child, as a trifling earnest of my esteem and my regard. Nay, do not deny me the satisfaction of thinking that you will ever have by you some token that may remind you of me.”

Anita Serral pressed to her lips the gentle hand thus extended to her, and then retired, under the conduct of the Señor de Villafior, to a gate that opened from the palace gardens into the road which was to conduct her to her home. How little could either foresee, when they there parted, under what altered circumstances they were destined again to meet!

At the appointed hour for the evening repast, our hero found the Señor de Maldonado standing alone in the saloon where the family party usually assembled. Endeavouring to repress the inward shudder with which he be-

held him, he hastened to join him, and to express his regret at having missed him so often during the latter part of the afternoon.

"I went to your apartment, Diego," said he, "when I heard that you had been more than once to inquire for me in my own, but I was told that you were without. I hope that you were at no inconvenience through my absence?"

"None whatsoever, amigo," replied Maldonado, with his blandest smile; "and even were it otherwise, there would be small grace on my part to complain, considering the far superior claims to your attention which you appear to have neglected during so considerable a portion of the evening. Santa Maria! Moriz, you must have been busily engaged indeed to have kept so fair a suitor in such long and anxious expectation. Still, you were right perchance, amigo," continued he, intently fixing his dark eye upon his younger companion: "at your happy age, LOVE and AMBITION are evil associates, and that heart should be free which would sustain and inspire manhood on the rugged ascent to distinction."

"He knows all: I had feared as much,"

thought Villafior to himself, as the sudden entrance of Doña Sirena dispensed him with the necessity of seeking some appropriate reply to the ominous remark of his crafty colleague.

During the supper, our hero had further leisure intently to observe Maldonado's countenance and bearing, nor could he but feel more and more convinced that the very suspicions which he and the Condesa most earnestly deprecated, were already fully aroused. On her side, Doña Elvira seemed perfectly mindful of the caution which she was bound to observe as well as to recommend, and she evidently laboured, as much as lay in her power, to maintain towards Don Diego that very deportment which she would most probably and most naturally have assumed, if no occurrence of any importance to her had taken place subsequently to her last and most momentous interview with him. The subdued look, the sad and pensive brow, the meek and faltering voice, all were there, enacted with the utmost skill which woman can command in the defence of her dearest interests, or in the prosecution of

her most cherished designs; and yet, however surpassingly excellent was the performance, there would still lurk in the submissive and downcast eye a gleam of inward serenity and of thrilling confidence which spoke of some secret, mysterious support from without, and which neither the keen consciousness of Villafior, nor the all-penetrating astuteness of his adversary, could long fail to remark. This symptom, slight and transient at first, insensibly grew more marked and more apparent, as Maldonado, with his wonted subtlety, unremittingly applied himself to elicit it by such covert but galling allusions to his own power and influence over her, which he conceived that he could safely hazard without betraying to any but herself that which he wished her alone to feel and to perceive. Then, the haughty glance and the disdainful smile would more freely reveal the still suppressed defiance of the liberated soul, and though not a word was uttered by Doña Elvira during the whole course of the evening, which could in any way denote the recent change in her prospects and disposition, our hero retired that night with an

entire persuasion that Maldonado had obtained an insight into the true state of things fully sufficient at least to place him thoroughly upon his guard.

"How can I doubt it now," muttered he to himself, when he reached his solitary apartment, having withdrawn from the saloon after every one else had quitted it: "he sees all—or at least he suspects all. Indeed, how could it be otherwise, when once he discovered from that unfortunate girl that I was for more than an hour closeted with the Condesa, immediately after he had himself left her this afternoon? Do what I will now, I shall gain small information enough from him henceforth as to what it concerns us most to know. I have shrewd misgivings still that my dagger upon his throat would be our speediest and surest resource; but I have promised Doña Elvira not to act in opposition to her own suggestions, and it is rather soon as yet to follow my own course. At all events, night, I have heard say, is a trusty adviser, and it will be but prudent to see what counsel this one may suggest."

Satisfied upon this point, the Señor de Vil-

laflor prepared to retire to his rest, and it is not surprising that, in the feverish excitement consequent upon the varied incident of the day, he should have turned, with peculiar good will, to a silver jar containing the highly-flavoured orangeade, which his page was in the habit of depositing in his room every evening throughout the sultry months. He poured out a huge goblet of this favourite mixture, and was on the point of carrying it to his lips, when he was suddenly arrested by the distant sound of some fierce contention without. Hastily laying down the untasted beverage, he approached the open window, and saw from thence that the tumult proceeded from a short conflict which had arisen between some patroles of the d'Ossuña regiment and a party of rather riotous students who had attempted to extinguish the torches of the guard. The latter having soon arrested the foremost amongst their assailants, and dispersed the remainder, our hero withdrew from the window, and was again about to raise his goblet of orangeade, when, the light of his waxen taper having fallen full upon it, he fancied that he could descry several particles

of dust, or of some substance closely resembling it, floating upon the surface. A more minute inspection did not deter him from tasting the liquor, and his suspicions were fully awakened by its harsh and unaccustomed flavour.

"Alma del Cid!" exclaimed he, the ominous warnings which he had received from Doña Elvira, and sundry other circumstances rushing with full force to his mind, "our friend Diego has perchance been at work here. In truth he is no idle partisan, but it were as well to know more before we stir further."

For a few moments, Moriz paced his room in deep and silent reflection; he then proceeded to a neighbouring chamber where reposed his faithful page, the trusty companion of all his travels and adventures from his earliest years.

"Guzman," said he, carefully awakening him from slumbers as deep as even a page ever enjoyed, "did you yourself prepare my orange-ade this evening?"

"Yes, Señor, assuredly," answered the half-roused follower.

"Was no one near you at the time?"

"No one soever, Señor."

“ And has none been near my apartment since then?”

“ Nobody, to my knowledge, Señor.”

“ When did you leave it?”

“ Only a few minutes, I should think, before I heard your step as you were returning to it.”

“ And that is how long ago, do you suppose?”

“ Why, not far from an hour, I should say, Señor.”

“ Exactly; that is all right,” resumed Villafior, not wishing to impart the misgivings which were now still further confirmed in his own mind. “ Rise up, Guzman, slip on your doublet, and go to the Señor Maldonado’s apartment. If you find him still waking, and I have little doubt that you will at this hour, tell him that I shall be much beholden to him if he will be so good as to come to me here for a few moments.”

Having given these directions, Villafior returned to his own room, and having restored his evening beverage to its usual place, as if it had remained untouched, drew some papers from his desk, so as to seem intent upon the

despatch of his official business when his colleague should appear. Within a very few minutes the latter entered, and, however practised he might be in the art of dissimulation, he could not forbear casting an anxious glance first upon Moriz, and then upon the orangeade, ere he inquired, in a tone of affectionate interest, what might be the cause of this unexpected summons?

"I thought that you would excuse me," replied Moriz, "but I was anxious to ascertain whether I have rightly understood and expressed here his excellency's intentions concerning those three deserters from the Flemish lansquenets, whose case has been referred to him by Quiroga. Just be so kind, amigo, as to read over what I have written out here."

"With the greatest pleasure," said Don Diego. "Let me see: with respect to that old offender, Van der Welt, the whole sentence to be carried out forthwith; as to the two juniors, one-third of the prescribed number of lashes, and one month's imprisonment to be remitted in consideration of their general good conduct. Nothing, I should say, could be set

forth in a clearer manner. Now let Quiroga have that early to-morrow morning: the rest concerns him alone."

"Thank you very much, Diego," resumed our hero: "I always feel safer when my performances have been inspected by you."

"A most unnecessary scruple of your youthful diffidence, amigo. Why, you are beginning to write as well as the Secretary Idiaquez himself."

"Nothing like good tuition and good example, Diego," answered our hero, placing his hand, in the friendliest manner, upon his trusty companion's shoulder: "I certainly shall not forget my instructor when my acquirements have been becomingly rewarded. In the meantime, let me offer you, in acknowledgment of your endeavours to make an efficient scribe of me, a glass of my orangeade. You have occasionally condescended to express your approbation of the manner in which it is prepared by my faithful Guzman."

"Not to-night, Moriz,—not to-night," replied the unmoved Maldonado. "I say, with the Orientals, that fruit is gold in the morn-

ing, silver at mid-day, and lead in the evening, though at your age no doubt the accuracy the proverb can scarcely have been tested."

"Well, then, here is to your health," resumed Villafior, again pouring forth, with the utmost apparent composure, a full goblet the suspected beverage. In so doing, he contrived to turn slightly away from his comrade and when he again suddenly gazed full up at Don Diego's face, while in the act of raising the cup to his lips, he there beheld another transient expression of such intense anxiety that his former misgivings were fully confirmed.

"Maldonado," continued he, still fixing steadfastly his eyes upon the quailing countenance of the traitor, "I like not this mixture to-night. Will you not taste it, and see whether my palate or Guzman's skill be in fault."

"No, amigo, I have already informed you of my objection."

"Then, I will not press you, Diego, nor will I make any rash experiments myself. Do you know, it often strikes me that none c

us is as cautious as he should be respecting poisonous drugs? we live in an age when dread perfection has been attained both in compounding and in administering them."

"Doubtless, Moriz; but I have a specific which enables me to bid defiance both to the poisoned cup and to the dagger."

"Indeed! May I ask what that may be?"

"The prescription is simply this, amigo: I endeavour that, while it can be no man's object to take my life, my death should be the greatest calamity which could befall many others. If you would still be ruled by me, remember both these terms of my receipt for bearing a charmed existence, when you reflect upon the vicissitudes and perils of a political career."

Having delivered this sage counsel in his most impressive voice and manner, Maldonado earnestly pressed the hand of his younger colleague, and left him to meditate upon the last, but not the least stirring incident of that eventful day.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

OUR hero's first care, upon the ensuing morning, was privately to send for the venerable Doctor Sanchez, the most renowned pharmacopolist in Barcelona, and to request him to submit to a careful but most secret analysis the orangeade which had excited his suspicions on the previous night. The result of this scientific investigation was duly communicated to him by the learned practitioner in the course of the afternoon, and left him no doubt that the potion would have caused almost instantaneous death had any considerable portion of it been swallowed. Fully satisfied upon this point, Villafior could not

but reflect, more seriously still than before, upon the dangers to which he must remain exposed, should his present state of unavowed and impotent contention with his ruthless adversary be much prolonged; and, indeed, if any additional warning had been required upon that head, it would have been furnished ~~et~~ more emphatically by a fresh occurrence which took place that very night.

The Governor-General was by this time so ~~ar~~ recovered from his recent attack, as again to assume, without yet quitting his chamber, a more prominent share in the ostensible direction of affairs. Thus it was, that, about night-fall, Villafior was summoned to his presence, and that he found him sitting at his table, with Maldonado standing close at his elbow.

"Señor Moriz," said the Conde, "you have forwarded my instructions to Quiroga respecting those deserters?"

"I did, may it please your excellency, at an early hour this morning."

"Well, here is a letter from a respectable burgess of this town, informing me that one of

them, Montez by name, is his relative, and a native of Barcelona. It would seem that the youth is a mere boy, who was enrolled in the corps during some drunken bout, and that he is worthy of still greater indulgence than I was myself disposed to show. Will you oblige me by going at once to Quiroga, who is not yet able to move, and requesting him, should it yet be time, to subject this Montez to no further penalty than that of imprisonment until we can have more closely investigated the matter. I shall be glad to hear that the reprieve has not come too late."

"Not a moment shall be lost on my part, your excellency may rest assured," replied Villafior, who fully shared the kind solicitude which the good-hearted veteran would ever display in similar circumstances. He then proceeded at once to his apartment, where he found the faithful Guzman in attendance.

"Run round," cried he, "to the stables, amigo, and see that my black charger be saddled, and brought round to the south postern door immediately; I have to go to the Señor Quiroga's."

"And I of course to accompany you, Señor?"

"By no means, Guzman: it would only cause loss of time to saddle two horses instead of one."

"I trust that you will excuse me, Señor," observed the sturdy follower; "but there is still much disaffection about, and you really should not thus adventure yourself in the narrow streets at such an hour, unarmed and alone."

"Very well, amigo," answered his impatient master; "I know of old that there is no keeping you out of danger's way, whether imaginary or tangible. Come, are you satisfied now, or must I slip on my friend Bolea's corselet, which did me such good service on the day of the corrida?"

"I own, Señor, that I would rather see it on your breast than in your wardrobe to-night."

"Well, I will gratify you on this point also; but, for Heaven's sake, betake your sapient self to the stables, and beware that I am not at the side-door before you are."

The progress of our hero, and of his trusty squire, to the residence of Don Balthazar Quiroga, at the further end of the town, was speedily and safely accomplished. The gallant captain, who was but slowly recovering from the effects of his wound, received his young visitor with his usual frank and military courtesy, and imparted to him the welcome intelligence, that the sentence passed upon Montez, which was only to be executed upon the ensuing morning, would consequently be remitted in accordance with the Captain-General's new recommendation. The matter having been satisfactorily and fully disposed of, Villafior lost no time in returning to the palacio.

The night was as dark as pitch, and had it not been for the torch which Guzman had not failed to provide, scarcely could either he or his master have recognised their shortest way through the intricate maze of narrow and obscure streets which they had to thread on their homeward course. They had proceeded, with tolerable rapidity, and without any obstruction, for more than half the distance, when, at the corner of a contracted lane, they were

met by a tall and sturdy-looking personage, who, in a loud and somewhat imperious voice, demanded of them what hour it might be? The impetuous Guzman merely replied, according to the fashion of the times, by applying his flaming torch to the face of the inquirer, and urging Moriz to move on; but a few seconds delay inevitably occurred, during which the stillness of the tranquil night was again harshly broken by the report of an arquebuse, apparently discharged from some neighbouring house.

"I am hit, but not hurt," whispered Villafior to his attendant, while he unsheathed his sword. "I shall cut this villain down, who, I make no doubt, is a party to the traitorous scheme; and just you see, Guzman, if you cannot identify the house from whence the shot proceeded."

"Nay, Señor, but that is out of the question in this utter darkness," returned the attendant. "In truth, you had better put spurs to your horse ere the foul attempt be renewed; and as to yonder guilopo, who has contrived to slip away under my very horse's

girths, he really is not worth pursuing. For Heaven's sake, move on, as you value your life."

The counsel was much too judicious not to be followed, and, within a few minutes more, the gallant steeds had borne their riders in safety to the wide and well guarded esplanade which opened out before the chief entrance of the palace.

Our hero's first care, after having dismounted from his horse, was to inform the Governor-General of the successful issue of his mission. He found Maldonado still in conference with the Conde when he re-entered the closet, and could well observe the death-like paleness which, for a moment, overspread his gloomy countenance, as he gazed upon the doubtless unexpected re-appearance of his younger colleague. Still Villafior thought it more prudent to make no allusion as yet to his recent and perilous adventure, and retired, with all becoming haste, to his own apartment. He there ascertained that the bullet which had struck him in the chest, not many inches from the heart, had glanced along the trusty

shirt of mail, and that the slight pain which he endured was caused by the rather severe contusion which the ball had inflicted as it tore, and drove into the skin, some links of the well-wrought corselet that had so happily intercepted its fatal progress. The wound was dressed at once by the care of Guzman, who, like the squires of former ages, was not without some slight skill in the ruder elements of the chirurgical science, and the Señor Moriz having so amended his toilet as to bear about him no trace or indication of the occurrence, descended again in time to partake of the evening repast, at which the Governor did not as yet assist. Nothing of any moment occurred during the supper-time, when the now apparently unconcerned Maldonado continued to take his usual prominent share in the conversation; but a few moments after they had returned to the saloon, the Condesa was seen to withdraw, in the direction of her own apartment, and nearly half an hour elapsed before she re-appeared.

“Señor de Maldonado,” she then said, “I really think that you are responsible for the

most irksome time that I have just spent in seeking for the copy, which the Conde procured for me, of the Señor de Vega's last comedy. Surely, I lent it to you yesterday morning?"

"Doubtless, madam," replied Don Diego; "and though I have not yet concluded the agreeable perusal of it, I can restore it to you at once, should you feel so inclined."

"Pray do; and I will let you have it again in the course of to-morrow."

No sooner had the door closed upon the retreating form of Don Diego, than Doña Elvira, looking towards our hero, resumed:

"May I intreat your attention for a moment aside, Señor de Villafior. You are unrivalled in the art of deciphering writing which is illegible to every other eye, and I have this day received, among my usual amount of petitions, one which may well defy even your skill."

Villafior, immediately obeying this welcome injunction, followed the fascinating Condesa to a distant corner of the apartment, where, to his surprise, she placed in his hand a letter written so clearly and so fairly as to do

honour to any titled escritor of the Calle Mayor. He gazed upon her intently that he might gather some explanation of the mystery, and then, by the brighter light of the huge waxen tapers which they had more nearly approached, he perceived that her face was as pale as death itself.

"Listen to me, Señor de Villafior," exclaimed she, eagerly, as, leaning forward, she seemed to study with him the paper before them; "listen to me, for I have a word that I must say to you, though I am aware that it were fatal that we should be seen or suspected to be in too secret conference. By the merciful interposition of heaven, you have, twice within the last twenty-four hours, been rescued from the death which was lying in wait for you."

"What mean you, noble lady?" replied our hero, in deep amazement.

"Nay, you need not attempt to deceive me," resumed the Condesa, mournfully. "I have many informants, as well I need have, and little escapes me that it is possible for woman's ingenuity to penetrate; but that matters not.

Ever since that awful and ill-starred hour, when you wrung from me what I never should have revealed, I have felt and deplored my weakness and folly, and I now see that they were more unpardonable than I could have deemed at first. I wished to tell you so, beseeching you no further to stir in this fatal matter, and to consider all that has lately occurred between us as the mere creation of some deceitful dream."

"Let me rather think, madam, that I am now contending with some fiend-inspired vision," answered our hero, pressing his hand to his burning brow in the extremity of manly distress. "It cannot be, that I have already forfeited the poor titles which I but yesterday possessed to your confidence and esteem."

"Not so, my generous champion," anxiously interposed the Condesa; "but I cannot endure the thought that your youthful life should remain exposed, on my account, to the ceaseless perils of which you think so lightly. My mind is fully made up; the Conde has been kinder and more truly paternal to me than ever in his manner during his present illness;

and I will bring my sorrows and terrors to their issue, by confessing all and throwing myself upon his mercy and forgiveness."

"Say not so, Señora, I conjure you," cried Villafior, as he beheld all the chivalrous day-dreams of his ardent and devoted passion melting into stern reality at this startling announcement. "Excuse me, if I speak with the frankness of a soldier; but such conduct would savour of the suicidal insanity which will impel the affrighted novice to fly from the perilous chances of the assaulted breach to the certain destruction of the precipice beneath it. Should your letter to your cousin be such as you have described, it would be an awful venture, indeed, to broach such a secret to your unsuspecting husband."

"I know it full well," sadly responded the ill-fated Dona Elvira; "but the consequences will, as they should, fall upon me alone; and anything is preferable to this state of agonized suspense."

"Hearken to me, noble lady. That this shall not be prolonged for more than one week, I will pledge the honour of my name, if, for that

short space of time, you will consent not to withdraw from me the cherished trust that I have received from you. Beware, madam—methinks I already hear that accursed traitor's returning steps. I will join the Lady Sirena, satisfied that your gracious silence should convey your still more gracious assent."

When Maldonado re-entered the room, he found his youthful comrade intently engaged in picturing to his fair companions the solemn gestures and deportment of a Mexican native chief with whom he had been commissioned by his father to treat, and the conversation was resumed in terms so amicable and easy that none could have suspected the desperate warfare which was raging within the secret hearts. Having at first made no allusion to the incident which had marked his return from Quiroga's residence, Villafior felt somewhat uncertain whether it would or would not be more prudent to mention it before he retired to rest; but just as the small circle was about to part for the night, the keener and readier wit of the Condesa apprized him that it was more

natural that he should himself reveal that which could not long remain a secret.

"Señor de Villafior," said she, glancing anxiously towards the wound in his chest, "may I ask if you are hurt?"

"I, madam?" replied he, somewhat amazed at first by this unexpected question.

"Yes, you, Señor. If my eyes mislead me not, there is a slight blood-stain, as if from a recent wound, upon your doublet."

The fair Sirena uttered a faint shriek as this intelligence was imparted by Doña Elvira, with a composure which must not a little have surprised the attentive Maldonado, but our hero, now fully warned, hastily exclaimed—

"Be not alarmed, gentle ladies; I was fired at in the streets this evening, but the bullet has inflicted no other injury than such as one of your needles might produce."

A detailed account of the whole occurrence was now called for by both the Señore, and frequently interrupted by expressions of sympathy and concern, amongst which those of Maldonado were by no means the least emphatic and affectionate.

"I am the more deeply annoyed, my very dear friend," said he, when the laconic recital was concluded, "that I much fear that you have received a ball which was intended for me. During the last fortnight, I have been informed more than once by the corregidor, that much discontent and animosity towards me prevailed here since the repression of the last outbreak, and indeed I have been favoured with no less than three anonymous letters to the same effect. I should by no means have allowed you to bear his excellency's commands through the town at such an hour."

"You forget, amigo," replied Moriz, smiling, "that to receive these small missiles is more my trade than yours. If I have been mistaken for you, I can only say that I am proud of the compliment; and should the shot have been aimed still more designedly at me, it shows that I am not considered so unimportant and so uninfluential as my modesty would suggest."

"Happy, happy cavaliers," observed the high spirited Condesa, "who are endowed by

nature with such nerves of steel, as to make even a death-thrust a subject of easy mirth!"

"Were our natural courage ever to fail us, we should know where it could be inspired afresh," replied both the caballeros, as they respectfully bade their evening farewell to their fascinating companions.

## CHAPTER XIX.

THE four ensuing days were almost exclusively devoted by our hero to the society of Maldonado, and nothing that he could devise was neglected by him to extract from his colleague some indication of that unknown friend or agent, to whose care he committed the momentous deposit of his secret papers. The wily Don Diego was, however, fully upon his guard, and while meeting his less experienced comrade upon terms apparently as amicable and confidential as ever, he did not furnish him the slightest insight into the subject of Villafior's most cautious, yet most anxious inquiries. We will not weary you,

gentle reader, with any detailed account of the skilful efforts resorted to on one side, or of the still more skilful vigilance with which they were foiled on the other: suffice it to say, that the unfortunate Moriz found himself within three days of the fatal term appointed for his chivalrous exertions in favour of Doña Elvira, without having obtained the slightest clue which could direct him even in his preliminary proceedings.

It will not unfrequently occur, that when the human mind is oppressed and engrossed with any species of grave concern, it cannot wholly deposit its wearisome burden, even when, by the choicest blessing of Nature, the exhausted frame has sought and found its customary repose. Thus, it is not much to be wondered that the Señor de Villafior should have been very sedulously haunted and pursued, during his sleep, by sundry visions more or less connected with the cares which absorbed him during his waking hours; but one of these creations of his over-excited fancy was so vivid and lifelike, as to leave behind it a more permanent impression than any of its forerunners.

He conceived himself to be seated at his writing-table, and engaged in the unwelcome labour of sorting his papers, when he there discovered, to his inexpressible joy, the very letter which he was bent upon recovering for Doña Elvira. There could be no doubt: he recognised the fairy hand, the fervent language of unaltered devotion, the name of the deeply blessed Fernando ever recurring, and ever accompanied by some epithet which spoke of the suffering heart's unflinching allegiance; he even saw and could trace, word by word, the too faithful description of those feelings which the youthful spouse could alone entertain for her aged lord. Indeed so forcible and striking was the imagery of the dream, that even after it had ceased, and our hero could distinctly behold the pale twilight struggling for admittance with the dark curtains of his chamber, he still experienced the thrilling sense of triumphant joy which had visited him during the happy but too transient delusion. Insensibly, however, the stern consciousness of his unavailing, and now almost hopeless efforts, returned and re-

mind him how little he had to expect, saving from his own aimless and almost despairing exertions.

"And yet," muttered he to himself, with something of the superstition of the age, "surely no such vision as this was ever sent to man without some corresponding import! Yonder table certainly does contain a motley and disorderly assemblage of papers, which I ought, long since, to have classed or destroyed. Among them are some notes from Maldonado himself, written to me at the end of last summer, when he, with the Conde and Condesa, was established at the Quinta, and I was left alone here in charge of the palacio. Perhaps some of these might contain an indication or an allusion, which, though unobserved by me at the time, would be priceless indeed now. As it is useless for me to attempt to sleep any more, what can I do better than proceed at once to this long deferred task?"

Having come to this conclusion, the Señor Moriz arose from his restless couch, and having hastily donned such loose garments as he was in the habit of wearing in the

seclusion of his chamber, applied himself assiduously to the investigation of his neglected bureau's varied contents. With these, gentle reader, neither we nor yourself have any direct or justifiable concern. It will suffice, that we should inform you, that after a minute examination, accompanied by a fearful destruction of inoffensive papers, our hero's attention was finally attracted by a letter which Don Diego had, several months before, addressed to him. This long forgotten mis-sive was to the following effect :—

“AMIGO,

“I write in the greatest haste, but you shall hear from me more fully upon the first opportunity. In the meantime, pray deliver to the bearer, who is perfectly trust-worthy, any papers whatsoever that he may require in my name, and take good care of the enclosed.

“Ever truly yours,

“DIEGO DE MALDONADO.”

Though this request had involved, at the time it was conveyed, no very singular con-

fidence, either in the bearer or in the Señor de Villafior himself, the documents alluded to having merely reference to some matters of military discipline, such as alone fell to the youthful secretary's particular charge and keeping, he could not but perceive to what purposes a similar injunction, authentically recorded in Maldonado's own hand, might be turned so soon as the party to whom the charge of that subtle personage's secret papers was entrusted, could be duly discovered.

"Then, there was something after all in my dream," exclaimed he in great joy; "I see in this blessed note, not only a most valuable future auxiliary, but also a happy omen of still more important success! I have yet three whole days before me, and, under the special favour of God and of our Lady, they shall suffice."

While these more hopeful reflections were inciting our youthful hero to further exertions, he received a summons from the Captain-General, requiring his attendance as soon as his toilet should be concluded.

Having, thereupon, proceeded in all haste to his noble patron's apartment, he found him already engaged with Don Diego in perusing some important despatches just received from Madrid.

"You will have a busy day, amigo," said the Conde to him, so soon as he entered. "Matters look worse and worse in Aragon, and, as civil war now seems inevitable, I am required to forward an immediate return of the troops which can be spared from this Principality. Now, as I am not prepared to part with any considerable force, you and Maldonado must set your young heads together to draw up such a statement of the present condition of Catalonia, as shall plainly show how none of our garrisons can be much weakened, consistently with the interest of the King's service."

"I should conceive, Señor Conde," replied Moriz, "that Diego will require my pen rather than my wit, but both are at his service for the whole day."

Though the courteous Maldonado was far from assenting to this surmise, it proved not

the less to be tolerably correct. While Villafior's pen and time were put into constant requisition, for the purpose of drawing up and copying sundry official statements, respecting the force and situation of the different military corps under the Conde de Sierra Dorada's command, the more experienced private secretary was preparing and recopying, in his own hand, a most luminous and comprehensive document, ably illustrating the opinion which the Governor desired to represent to the Court. These official labours were apparently concluded before nightfall, when Maldonado retired, as he was wont to do on similar occasions, to the innermost recesses of his own apartment, there to write and to close his personal letters. Twice did our hero devise some pretext for hastily breaking in upon his comrade's busy solitude, but each time he was met by him at the door and conducted into a neighbouring room, obtaining thereby no other insight into the nature of Diego's occupations, saving an increased conviction, that that wary individual intended to confide to the well known and trusty courier about to be

despatched, some private missive of no ordinary secrecy and moment. This persuasion, gentle reader, together with the phrenzied excitement which augmented hour by hour as the appointed time for the fulfilment of his pledge flew fast and still faster from his grasp, finally impelled the Señor de Villafior to the conception and commission of one of the rashest acts of his adventurous career. We must, however, for the present, leave him in close conference with the too faithful Guzman, while we introduce to your notice a subordinate person as yet unknown to you, but whose share in some future proceedings, to which we shall have hereafter to call your notice, will not be inconsiderable.

How the connexion between Luigi Davila and Maldonado first commenced no one at Barcelona had clearly ascertained; but ere the latter had been many months in attendance upon the Captain-General of Catalonia, he had persuaded his patron to admit into his household the above named Italian in the capacity of confidential messenger. Thus, whenever any important despatches were to

be forwarded to Madrid, they were usually intrusted to Davila; and, even when he was not employed in this capacity, his constant appearance in all places of public resort at Barcelona, and his numerous private interviews with Don Diego, led many to suppose that his services were required for more purposes than one. On this occasion, he had been directed to hold himself in readiness by night-fall; but when the evening repast was announced, Don Diego had not yet concluded his solitary labours. He hastily interrupted them to join the supper table, where he found Villafior and the two Señore engaged in a light and animated conversation, in which none soon took a more active share than himself. When the small party broke up, he retired to his room, and, within half an hour, the dark-browed emissary was despatched, receiving the usual instruction to be careful, to the death, of his charge, and to deliver it with all possible expedition.

Notwithstanding the darkness of the moonless night, Davila proceeded on his lonely mission with the speed and assurance of one

he was suddenly accosted, coming of the road, by two men but whose features and appearance to distinguish.

"Halt and deliver your weapons, they both at once.

"Nay, stand back yourself," retorted Davila, with well tried fortitude and resolution, "I know me, my masters, as I know you must be aware that you have no weapons."

"Shall I fire?" inquired the first of the other as he presented his sword, "he has drawn his sword."

"Yes," responded his companion.

"Now, surrender your despatches, for we know that they contain some valuable remittances, and these we must have, though we should be loath to injure you."

With these words, the foremost of the aggressors proceeded forcibly to wrest from the prostrate messenger the small valise or portfolio which contained his official charge. Davila, upon whom the dying horse had fallen with its whole weight, being unable to offer sufficient resistance, determined at least to be in some measure revenged; he drew his dagger, and, with all the force that he could command, struck full at his assailant's arm.

"Ah, snake! thou canst sting after that we have crushed thee," exclaimed the latter; "but I have a fang as sharp as thine own," and seizing his own poignard, he drove it into the breast of his antagonist.

"I am sorry for that stroke, Guzman," whispered his companion, in a tone of mingled regret and compunction; "he was but faithfully executing his duty, and our object was attained. Do you think that you have killed him?"

"I know not, Señor; but if I have, he will bear no tales. I had no intention to strike, until I felt the blade of his poignard upon the very bone of my arm, and his blood must be upon his own head. At all events, here are the despatches."

"They are dearly bought, Guzman; I trust that they will be worth the price. We had better now slip into yonder thicket, where you can strike a light, and we shall soon see which of these papers we can take and which we shall leave."

Within a few minutes, a waxen taper was lit in a sequestered glade of the neighbouring wood, and our hero, for we lament to say that it was none other than he, as, gentle reader, you will have doubtless divined ere this, having bound up the wounded arm of his page, proceeded to open with great care, first the valise, and then its sealed enclosures. He was not long in selecting from among them Maldonado's private despatch, addressed, as usual, to the Señor Asumar, as well as those remittances of valuable bills and bonds which might be supposed to have incited the cupidity

of some of the desperadoes, who, notwithstanding the vigilance of the Captain-General's police, would occasionally, at that period, infest both the coast and the highways of Catalonia.

"Guzman," said he, this unwelcome task having been concluded, "you can break the seals of these despatches and strew them on the road by the body of that unfortunate man, so that both his bag and papers may, to the utmost, bear the appearance of having been rifled. As to these bills, I can destroy them here, and duplicates can be sent, so as to entail no loss upon the crown. Now, hand me that torch, while I look still closer into the contents of this packet."

With these words, and not, we will say, without some scruple of conscience, Villafior opened Maldonado's letter to Asumar, which he found to contain a long and secret report respecting the state of affairs in Catalonia, and another sealed enclosure, addressed to a young escribiente, whose name he could now remember to have heard Don Diego mention upon some former occasion. This parcel

merely infolded another, bearing the following direction:—

“TO THE SENORA LAURA DE AQUINA,

“*Al Castanar,*

“*Near Saragossa.*

“*Family papers, to be forwarded by a safe hand.*”

“Ah, ah!” cried Villafior, joyfully; “I think that we have struck upon the right path at last,” and in tremulous eagerness he broke the triple array of seals.

The packet contained, as he then saw, several confidential letters and papers relating to the public or private concerns either of Don Diego himself or of other parties who might have it in their power to serve or to injure him. These were carefully sorted, numbered, and recommended to the care of his sister, in a hurried note of about twenty lines at most, for the possession of which our hero would blithely have sacrificed his left arm not an hour before, as he distinctly read there the following phrase:—

“While I more than ever entreat you to

preserve all that I send with the greatest possible secrecy and vigilance, I must again remind you that a certain love letter addressed to a certain Fernando, and signed 'your ever desolate Elvira,' is among the papers which I most value; I may require you at any time to forward it to me, but you must deliver it to none saving a special messenger, whom I should despatch to you for that purpose."

"Now, Santa Maria receive my humble and grateful thanks," cried the enraptured Moriz; "ere to-morrow's sun be set thy shrine in the cathedral shall be decorated with the richest taper and stand that old Pedrona's craft has yet executed. But it is time now that we return to the city."

Having summoned his attendant, he carefully removed from the secluded spot where he was standing, every trace of their passage there, and he returned to the road side, where the unfortunate Davila was lying amidst the torn and scattered fragments of his despatches.

"Do you think that life is extinct, Guzman?" inquired he, in a low voice.

"Completely so, Señor, I should say."

1  
“Unquestionably, Señor; but you need not fear that it will remain there very long. Within two hours we shall have the exiles and market mules moving this way towards the city, and he will have plenty of help. He should help be of any avail to him. As to the Señor, I deferentially think that it were better that we should take to our horses again and have led them to that tree opposite.”

Having remounted their steeds, the cavaliers wended their way homeward, with as much speed as to reach the outward precincts of the city ere the gates were opened. They proceeded first to a lonely cottage, tenanted by a safe friend of Guzman's, where they quitted the disguise which they had taken on the previous night and waited until the

no suspicions of their absence should be raised in the Captain-General's stables, they returned thither separately and on foot, so that each might appear to have been merely taking his accustomed walk, about that hour, in the offices and neighbourhood of the palacio.

When, rested and refreshed after his night's exertions, our hero met Doña Elvira at their noontide repast, he could observe that she was unusually sad and pensive; and soon after they had reached the withdrawing-room, Maldonado having been summoned away by the Governor, she approached Moriz, and whispered, in a soft and melancholy voice:—

“To-morrow is the last day, my champion.”

“You must grant me three weeks more,” replied he, in the same tone; “and I will abide the extremity of your displeasure should you ever have to regret this delay.”

“How mean you?” exclaimed she, moving still further away from Doña Sirena. “There is a confidence in your voice and looks which I have never seen there before: have you really any hope to give me?”

“As yet, madam, I can merely say that I

"To Madrid?"

"Yes, fair madam, to Madrid where afterwards."

"And will this sudden suspicion?"

"I trust not, madam assistance. You will understand receive some mission from me. I shall most unwillingly obey deference to his commands."

"And I suppose, that I am unwilling, too?" resumed she however without as lovely mantled a youthful beauty! was a time, Señor de Villamor said: "I am not a man."

suade the Conde that your presence in Madrid might be conducive to his interests, for that is, I presume, what we must achieve."

"Precisely, madam; and perhaps I could suggest something, if you would allow me first to inquire whether you have not thought it your duty occasionally to warn his excellency not to place too implicit confidence in Maldonado's devotion?"

"I have, Señor de Villafior, often and often; but still, as yet, with great caution, as I may not dare anything like an open contest with my persecutor."

"Do you think that you could induce the Governor to believe, madam, that Maldonado is attributing to himself an undue share in the management of affairs here during his excellency's indisposition?"

"Well, I think I could succeed so far," said the Condesa, with a slight smile.

"And that he would do well to have some one at Court who, as an eye-witness, could affirm that his excellency is in nowise debarred by his health from pursuing his official avocations?"

go this very day, and I  
urge so great precipit  
such suspicions as it wou  
I should prefer waiting  
sible occasion should pr

“ It will occur this  
calmly replied Villafior.  
hear that the messenger  
has been waylaid, robbe  
I mistake not, some such  
the cause of Maldonado's  
now; and see, madam, t  
in the direction of the c  
Were his excellency full  
presence at Madrid wou  
him, I make no doubt th  
me to bear the duplicate

ing almost to dismay, and her face had become deadly pale, ere she muttered, with a trembling voice:—

“ Oh ! Señor de Villafior, may Heaven defend and forgive us both, if there is any reason for your having been so speedily informed of this fearful intelligence.”

“ Do not inquire into, do not think upon such matters, gentle lady,” eagerly replied Villafior. “ Remember, that the priceless stake is your own honour, for which any caballero in Spain would deem as little of shedding the blood of another, were it the Prince of the Asturias himself, as of sparing his own. Much has already been accomplished: a little more courage, a little more patience, and all will be successfully achieved; but the present is a critical day.”

The Condesa mournfully shook her head, as, for a second, she remained in sad and silent abstraction; she then resumed:

“ I suppose that I should join the Governor, that our train may be laid, so that it explode at the return of that traitor, upon whose head all this misery and misfortune must for ever rest.”

With these words, she returned to Doña Sirena, who had remained in the room while happily, as well as pleasantly, absorbed in the still recent and noble epic of Portuguese soldier poet: she playfully shaded, with two slight hands, the lustrous eyes of her husband, and tenderly embracing her, led her from the apartment.

If ever, gentle reader, you have been engaged in devising or executing, with the aid of your heart, any species of scheme or stratagem of which the working was to remain secret to all but yourselves, you will understand how the Señor de Villafior felt himself so amply rewarded, in that short half-hour, for all his most irksome and unwelcome exertions of the previous night.

## CHAPTER XX.

INTO what may have occurred between the Conde de Sierra Dorada and his fascinating companion, as, established in her usual place on the arm of his huge easy chair, she seemed to be sportively calling his attention to fifty different subjects, while, in fact, she concentrated it more and more upon that which absorbed her own anxious thoughts; into these proceedings, I say, gentle reader, you will, we feel sure, be far too discreet to inquire. As to their result, you shall learn it no later than did our hero himself.

No sooner had Villafior been informed by his attentive page that Maldonado had re-en-

account of the event of the night, far as it was known as yet, reports of the peasantry or the corregidor's special emissaries.

"This is a sad business," Conde, at length; "but we must not waste matters by deploring them, and must at once at these duties must be forwarded to-day. Under the charge of them, Maldonado?"

"There are many in your household, Señor Conde, who are of the trust and anxious to receive

"Ay, amigo; but after what I really should not feel myself justifying such important matters

“ Well, in accordance with your excellency’s kind permission, I must admit that I should be loath to leave Barcelona at this moment.”

Just then Doña Elvira entered the room, and with a slight apology for intruding upon the Conde’s busier hours, requested to be informed if any fresh particulars had been received respecting the sinister event which was now the subject of conversation throughout the palacio. Her very natural curiosity upon this point having been satisfied, the Governor resumed :—

“ So, you are unwilling, Señor de Villafior, to bear these despatches to the Court?”

“ I should rather suppose that he would be,” interposed the Condesa, “ considering the chances that he may meet with on the road.”

“ Her excellency’s observation,” retorted our hero, with affected gravity, “ makes it incumbent upon me to proffer to you, Señor Conde, those services which I entreat you to believe are always at your command.”

“ Nay, amigo; but if you would rather not,” said the Conde——

“ And if,” interrupted the Condesa, “ any-

threat that you will not  
mind for a second."

"I will endeavour to  
yet I cannot but feel that  
our credit that these desp  
safely carried."

"Perhaps that might  
even should his excellency  
you with this unwelcome  
remarked Maldonado, who  
nothing clearly, had a vague  
judice against any arrange  
which he had not been him

"Certainly, Diego," said  
you must remember that we  
both to impart and to rec  
withstanding all your abil

unfriendly notions which may have been circulated there of late."

These latter words were fully sufficient to change the current of Maldonado's incipient misgivings; and perceiving, for the first time, an indication, however slight, of a latent suspicion on the part of the Governor with respect to himself, he thought it more prudent unreservedly to assent at once to the Conde's views. It was not so with Doña Elvira, who did not fail to combat them with some pertinacity, until a rather haughty retort from the veteran warned her that it would be unwise to prolong the controversy.

The remainder of the day was spent by our hero in preparing with Maldonado the duplicate copies of the despatches he was to bear; and when that task was concluded, he did not neglect to place his services at the disposal of his companion, in terms of the sincerest friendship.

"Thank you, amigo, thank you," replied Don Diego, in the same tone, and seizing both his hands. "Respecting the state of affairs

so, unless the royal arms sh  
some serious reverse in Arago  
very probable. As to myself  
kind enough to mention me, I  
letter to Asumar, and if you h  
nity of putting in a good wo  
sure that you will, recollecting  
cessary it is that neither of us  
assume any undue share in t  
of the concerns attributed t  
General. Bear that in mind,  
self as well as for me."

When he had thus taken  
Diego, our hero proceeded  
apartment, where he found l  
Doña Elvira

I have trusted that you will be both willing and able to give that account of my humble endeavours to serve his majesty at this crisis, which may best insure me against any loss of the royal esteem and favour. I know that I am neither so young, nor so active, as when I had toiled a few years less to obtain and to justify them; but I am not conscious of having deserved to forfeit them. I will say no more, as I am sure that you understand me. As to yourself, you will find that I have not forgotten to mention your excellent services in my private letters. Now, a Dios, amigo; let us hear from you, if a good opportunity offers, and let us see you again within a month."

Having bid his chief an appropriate farewell, Moriz approached the Condesa, who coldly, but very courteously, acknowledged his valedictory compliment, and even, upon an injunction from her husband, extended her hand that he might press it to his lips. Before, however, that he had quite closed the door, after having made a last obeisance, he overheard her exclaiming—

"Ah! Señor Dios, what a memory I have:

I have forgotten to give him my letter for my cousin Pepita."

A moment afterwards, she was standing alone by our hero in the centre of the neighbouring room. She was very pale, and her lips and voice trembled alike, when she said—

"Señor de Villafior, here is another letter which I recommend to your care. If ever you should think of me when you are far away, remember my last parting word of entreaty and of injunction—that you incur no peril which may be honourably avoided, and that you lay no rash deeds to the charge of my conscience. Recollect that I have already a burden to bear heavier than I can well endure.

She again extended her hand, and then glided hastily back to rejoin the Conde.

When, in due course of time, our hero reached the noble city of Madrid, his first care was to wait upon the Señor Asumar, who received him with great kindness, conversed very freely with him, and finally introduced him into the presence of the Secretary Mouroux himself. This stern personage addressed to him respecting the state of affairs in Catalonia

several questions, which afforded him more than one opportunity of touching upon the undiminished activity and energy of his chief. The interview having been concluded, Villafior proceeded to the Despacho Universal, to embrace his trusty companion of former days, Francisco de Bolea. The surprise of this excellent friend was far exceeded by his joy on beholding him; many and affectionate were the greetings which they interchanged, but the shrewd escribiente, well remembering the former weakness of Moriz, did not suffer him to depart, until he had presented him to Don Juan Idiaquez, as the bearer of the last official tidings from Catalonia. The courteous Minister displayed more than his usual good grace in welcoming his youthful visitor, and detained him for more than half an hour in the closest and most confidential conversation. Alas! for the mutability of the human mind! Could our hero, some months before, have seen himself in similar future intercourse, upon the affairs of the realm, with those two very potentates whose coldness and indifference had well nigh driven him from Madrid in absolute

ing subject, that he joyfully hai  
when, having conscientiously d  
duty which he could imagine, he  
again with his own secret refle

The more he meditated up  
which he had to pursue, the  
satisfied that he would do we  
assistance and co-operation o  
Bolea, without, however, imp  
any indication of what he ju  
himself bound to reveal to no  
pitiable friend having insisted  
occupying his former room v  
apartment, an excellent opport  
itself that very evening for 1  
him the contemplated amoun

I have only accomplished as yet a small portion of my mission, and that, for the rest, I am in the utmost need of your countenance and good counsel."

"Indeed, amigo; pray lose no time in letting me know how they may serve you."

"Well, in the first place, it will be requisite that I should, without leaving Madrid, carry on personally some transaction at Saragossa."

"Such things have been done, ere now," said Bolea; "particularly if it be not necessary that the ubiquitous personage should enjoy the same amount of health in each place where he may be simultaneously residing."

"I see that we understand each other," resumed Moriz. "Then you conceive that I could be lying ill here, under your hospitable roof, and the imaginary care of your page, while I should be fully at liberty to attend to other matters in Aragon?"

"Unquestionably; I think that I can answer for alarming more than half Madrid upon the score of your health, while your couch in the neighbouring room will be occupied by any counterfeit Villafior whom you

may suggest, or, should you prefer it, remain entirely untenanted."

"Nothing can be better, so far. Now to the second point. Have you, among your acquaintances, in this vast and ingenious city one who could teach or assist me so to disguise my face and person as to prevent their being identified by one who can only know of them by description?"

"I think the old renegade Jew, Sanchez, can do that for you so effectually, that even—who shall I say?—even the Condesa de Sierra Dorada herself would not know you again. Shall I send my page for him at once? He is as discreet as he is handy. But soft, Señor Moriz—all these mysterious journeyings and disguises savour somewhat of hazardous adventure. I trust that your boldness has learned a little caution during your intercourse with Maldonado?"

"Oh! be not alarmed on my account, Francisco: I am become a convert to more than one point of your doctrines, since I have acquired rather more experience myself. I wish that I could tell you all——"

"Nay, amigo," hastily interrupted Bolea, "you know that secresy is my trade, and that I ever enforce it upon others as strictly as I observe it myself. Not a word upon your mysterious expedition to Aragon, except what it may be indispensable for me to know. Only tell me if I can do anything more for you either there or here?"

"Let me see, Francisco. You will oblige me, while I am away, by ascertaining as correctly as you can, how the Conde de Sierra Dorada at present stands in the estimation of the Court, and by industriously circulating the report that, notwithstanding his recent indisposition, he never was more active or more efficient. You understand me, querido?"

"Perfectly."

"Now, for your native Aragon, Bolea. Do you happen to know anything respecting a certain Doña Laura de Aquina, who resides near Saragossa?"

"I do—that is to say, indirectly. Is she not sister of your friend Maldonado?"

"She is."

"Exactly. Then I have often heard her

alluded to by a youth who is employed the Secretary Moura's office, and who is, I conceive, a sort of relative of hers."

"Tell me all you can respecting her."

"Well, I have generally heard her mentioned as a person of no very brilliant attainments but who has something of her brother's clear perception of her own interests. She is older than him, and returned to Saragossa, some few years since, after a long and mysterious absence, with funds enough to purchase, in the neighbourhood, a sort of quinta, or rather farm-house, where she herself lives, in daily and hourly attendance upon all the duties of a country life. Should you have to deal with her on such matters, you will find her tolerably shrewd and close-fisted, though she is singularly ignorant of the courtesies and habits of the higher classes."

## CHAPTER XXI.

A VERY few days after this conversation between our two friends, the amiable lady to whom they had alluded might have been seen seated in the kitchen of her dwelling, and anxiously intent upon superintending the preparations for her evening repast. She had gone through, in their due succession, all the labours of her farm-yard, had cudgelled, with her own fair hand, a servant boy who had neglected to feed her pigs at the proper hour, had herself administered the provender to her cows and to her poultry, and she still bore the very toilet and appearance which was most strictly in accordance with such pursuits, when

ward semblance could scarce  
among Doña Laura's failings  
the twilight was already begi  
dusky shadows upon all arc  
forth at once to meet him.

She beheld a tall and se  
aged man, corpulent in size, w  
darker than his flaxen hair, s  
continued exposure to the wi  
and whose accent, when he a  
voured strongly of Flemish or

"The Señora Laura de A  
stranger, inquiringly.

"Your servant, Señor," ans

"I come on the part of my  
your brother, Don Diego de M  
liver into your own hands this

“ You have known him long, Señor?”

“ Our acquaintance began about eight years since, in my native city of Antwerp.”

“ May I make so bold, Señor, to inquire whom I have the honour to address?”

“ My name, madam, is Carl van der Linden.”

“ I remember hearing it mentioned by my brother as that of a valued friend. Shall I open the letter in your presence, Señor?”

“ If you should so feel inclined, madam, for I have to require the favour of an answer.”

Doña Laura, having procured a lighted taper, very carefully examined the packet which had been delivered to her, and easily recognised both her brother's handwriting, and the official seal of the Captain-General, which he frequently used when corresponding with her. Having then opened the despatch, and very intently scrutinized its contents, she resumed :

“ I am desired by my brother, Señor, to deliver into your hands some papers of his which are in my keeping, and which you will yourself designate. May I ask which they are?”

“ In the first place, madam, his correspond-

ence with the Señor Molina de Medrano during the whole of last year."

"Very well, Señor."

"And then," continued the stranger, consulting some curious hieroglyphics in his memorandum-book, "an amorous letter, signed, 'Your ever desolate Elvira.'"

At these words, Doña Laura cast a long and searching glance at her apparently unconscious visitor, and then said:

"I am surprised that my brother should send me no further indication than that. I fear that I shall hardly be enabled to identify the letter which he requires. Can you tell me to whom it is addressed?"

"To the Senor Don Fernando de Haro, I believe, madam; but, if I understood Diego aright, the name Fernando alone is mentioned."

"Well, I will endeavour to discover it, and should I succeed, Señor, when shall I deliver it to you with the other papers?"

"Why, as soon as convenient to yourself, madam, as I must leave Saragossa by sunrise to-morrow morning."

"Indeed! so soon?" anxiously replied the Señora Laura; "I will do my best. But the fact is, that these letters are not here, are not close at hand.—Could not you, Señor, defer your departure for one day?"

"Not for one hour, madam. I have come to Saragossa merely to negotiate a bill of exchange, which is already accomplished, and I must proceed at once, first to Barcelona, and then to Genoa, where I am already expected. However, madam, the principal part of your brother's intentions are already fulfilled. I have safely delivered the enclosed papers into your own hands; I have pointed out to you that letter to which he was unwilling to allude more distinctly in writing: you will now yourself, I doubt not, easily procure some safe opportunity for transmitting to him what he requires."

"Not so, Señor," answered Doña Laura, seriously alarmed at the assumed indifference of her visitor; "such occasions are rarer than ever now, in these disturbed times. If you will but inform me where you are staying at Saragossa, I think that I shall be enabled to

bring or send you the papers within two hours."

"As you please, Señora. I shall await your commands, at the Posada del Cisne Negro, until sunrise to-morrow morning."

A few further compliments having been exchanged between them, the portly stranger bade farewell to the Señora Laura, and to the Castañar, and slowly wended his way back to the Black Swan, where he found his page awaiting his return.

"Guzman," cried he, joyfully, "I trust that I have succeeded, but never I believe was my life in greater danger. I am well-nigh ready to expire with the heat of this wig, and with the burden of these ponderous casings of wool, which unfortunately I may not cast off yet, as I am expecting a visitor, who must see no one here but Carl van der Linden himself."

"At all events, Señor, you can doff the wig until he is announced. Do you still intend starting to-morrow morning?"

"I trust so, amigo."

"Not more than I do, Señor," fervently added the attendant.

"Indeed! how so, Guzman? You are no true Aragonese, to be so anxious to leave your capital?"

"With all deference, Señor, it is on that very account that I should be loath to remain here, merely to witness a struggle in which my duty towards you would, I fear, forbid me to take my proper part."

"A struggle, amigo? Do you mean to say, that your restless countrymen are really contemplating another rising?"

"I have been in various parts of the city during the whole afternoon, Señor, and if I mistake not, we shall have some rude knocks here ere to-morrow's sun be set."

"So soon! And pray what may the cause or pretext be now?"

"The legitimate defence of our Fueros, Señor, which, as we understand, are again about to be violated in the case of the Señor Antonio Perez, with which you are doubtless, Señor, perfectly conversant."

"Well, to be frank with you, Guzman, I must admit that I have rather lost sight of its complicated details within the last two months.

charges brought against  
before the secret tribunal  
tion, but delivered by the  
hands of the inquisitors to  
ject him to any regular  
had conceived and hoped  
question had been set at rest.

“By no means, Señor,  
gonese attendant, with confidence.  
ness. “The Crown and the  
merely been temporizing, but  
done none of their evil intentions.  
appear that, after much delay and  
certainty, thirteen jurists have  
to inquire into the question.  
these traitors have decided.  
sitors will but claim the  
terms as men.”

they will find the people of Aragon still prepared to contend for their rights, even though they should be abandoned by some of our degenerate nobility."

"It is an ill-starred business altogether," resumed our hero, thoughtfully; "and I have said so from the first. At all events, I see, amigo, that I must remove you from Saragossa without loss of time, or that you will be up to your neck in treason ere the world is many days older. But soft, is not that a knock at the door? My wig, my flaxen wig, amigo, and do you stand back discreetly while I admit my fair visitor, for I trust that it is she."

In this hopeful expectation Moriz was not disappointed. When he opened the door, the Señora Laura herself cautiously entered, and delivered into his hands a sealed letter for her brother, but, pretexting the lateness of the hour, declined the Señor van der Linden's courteous invitation that she should take a little repose, if not refreshment, at the Posada.


Followed at some distance by his page, our

## LOVE AND AMBITION.

Don Juan accompanied her into the courtyard, and then desired Guzman to watch her retreating until she had turned the corner of the adjoining street; but it was not until he had been assured that she was actually out of sight, that he returned to his apartment, closed the door behind him, and, with a trembling hand, broke the seals of the despatch. Oh, unimaginable joy! the first paper which he there beheld was the "desolate Elvira's" own devoted letter! There could be no doubt; it was her signature, her fairy handwriting throughout, and, above all, the matchless eloquence of her own impassioned soul. One glance sufficed to convince the enraptured Juan that he had not been deluded or deceived. For besides many other tokens, the early traces of the luckless Fernando de Vargas's early death were still distinctly visible. The treasured prize was then refolded without being read, and laid in safety upon a heart as true and devoted than that which had seen its earlier resting-place.

By daylight on the following morning, the Duke de Vallader and his trusty attendant

were both fully equipped and ready for their journey, when they were all of a sudden startled by a loud knock at the door of their chamber. Guzman having partially opened it, ascertained that it proceeded from a messenger sent by the Señora Laura de Aquina to request that her letter for her brother might be returned to her for a short period, as she had omitted to enclose one of the required papers. This was an awful conjuncture indeed, but our hero's presence of mind did not forsake him. He desired the boy to be admitted, inquired of him to whom his communication was addressed, and informed him in return that Herr van der Linden was probably, by that time, more than three leagues distant on the road to Barcelona. The youth, in nowise suspecting that the gallant Spanish caballero before him was the identical Flemish trader whom, on the previous evening, he had introduced to his mistress, departed with the unwelcome intelligence in the direction of the Castañar, while our hero and his page hastily settled their account with their host and mounted their steeds.



was occupied by large body  
troops, who were exchanging ;  
suppressed hostility and most  
the sturdy citizens that were  
them in menacing groups; wh  
tenance of each more peacef  
extremity of alarm and anxi  
depicted. Soon a noble arr  
vancing towards the market-pl  
by an imposing escort of t  
midst of whom Moriz recogni  
patron the Duque de Villaher  
indignant Guzman pointed ou  
Aranda, de Morata, and many c  
high standing.

“The traitors!” muttered

replied Moriz, in a tone which betrayed the deep interest that he could not but still feel in the fate of the eminent captive.

"We shall see, Señor, we shall see," exclaimed his attendant; "for our shortest road lies before the door of the prison. There was a time when the very stones would have risen in Saragossa on such a day; but then our gallant nobles were not become politicians and courtiers. It matters not, the voice of the people may yet be heard."

As these words were uttered, a loud discharge of fire-arms from the neighbouring street seemed to come, as it were, in awful confirmation of their import. The fearful sound was repeated more than once, and re-echoed soon by the still more appalling cry of the rising insurrection.

"Do you hear that?" said the enthusiastic Guzman; "and see, there are the accursed Castilians already flying fast before our gallant avengers. Ha! ha! ha! they shall learn to-day the temper of our Aragonese swords."

However infelicitous these stirring incidents were to the speedy progress of our hero's

journey, he could not but feel a very deep interest in what was passing around; and as, besides, any further advance was for the present impossible, there was no alternative but to remain a tranquil spectator of the forthcoming results.

These were not long delayed. Not only was the whole spirit of the mutinous inhabitants of Saragossa decidedly hostile to the Castilian troops, and to their Aragonese confederates, but large bands of the more open adherents of Perez, fully equipped and armed for the occasion, were pouring forth from all sides in the direction of his prison, kindling as they went the long smouldering embers of the former insurrection with the electric cries of "Contra Fueros, Ayuda a la Libertad." One of these well-organized battalions swept down the very street where our hero and his attendant had taken their station, and great was Villafior's surprise and dismay when he found himself hailed by its leader, ere he had himself time to recognise the martial features and person of the intrepid Gil de Mesa.

"Ah! Señor de Villafior," cried this reck-

less partisan, entirely disregarding Moriz's sign that he wished to remain unnoticed; "Ah! Senor de Villafior, welcome to Saragossa, and in good time! See here, my gallant friends," continued he; "have not I told you from the first, that our Catalonian brothers were in arms, and flying fast to our rescue? Here is the Señor de Villafior, the chief equerry to the Captain-General, who has ridden hard to inform us that their noble vanguard is close at hand. And who but he should announce this joyful intelligence, the son of one of the Señor Antonio Perez's chief favourites?"

"I vow, I protest,"—exclaimed our indignant hero, endeavouring in vain to extricate himself from the sturdy grasp of his most unwelcome acquaintance.

"It needs not, it needs not," interrupted the imperturbable Gíl de Mesa: "all here know that you bear a true Aragonese heart. Now, my children, forward in good earnest. Long live the Señor de Villafior! long live our trusty Catalonian allies! On, on to the prison."

When these cries had been heartily re-echoed by a thousand deafening voices, among which few were louder or more impassioned than that of the Señor Guzman himself, the crowd so closely encircled Moriz and his imprudent attendant, that it was absolutely out of their power to struggle with the human tide, which carried them rapidly on in the direction of the Manifestados. There, after a slight show of resistance, the gates were thrown open before the infuriated mob, and the fallen Minister liberated by the hand of his own faithful adherents. Happily, in the exulting sense of the triumph which they had just achieved, their new-born, but momentary enthusiasm for the supposed representative of the Catalonian sympathies, was forgotten, and our hero was finally enabled to effect his escape towards the Puerta de Madrid, most unwillingly followed by his warlike page.

## CHAPTER XXII.

I SUPPOSE that I need not inform you, gentle reader, that the Señor de Villafior's return, first to Madrid, and then to Barcelona, was accomplished with the utmost speed; and that his heart beat so violently when he crossed the threshold of the Conde de Sierra Dorada's palace, that he was constrained to pause more than once, that he might recover his breath, ere he was shown into his chief's apartment. Great was his satisfaction on finding the Governor there alone, and on receiving from him the most heartfelt welcome.

"I am delighted again to see you, Moriz," exclaimed the veteran, as he embraced

him with the tenderness of a father : " I never knew how useful and agreeable your services were to me, until I voluntarily deprived myself of them. I am well aware, however, that you have not forgotten my wishes when you were away from me, and most happy am I to receive from yourself an accurate account of the true state of things in Madrid at this crisis."

Our hero did not fail to impart to the Captain-General all the information which he had received from his friend, Bolea, during his second short passage through Madrid, respecting the deep anxiety with which the intelligence of the second, and still more successful insurrection of the Aragonese, had been received at Court, as well as the uncertainty which there prevailed as to the consequent intentions of the crafty Sovereign towards his revolted subjects. When these topics had been exhausted, the Governor began to open the various despatches which our hero had brought back for him, and the latter then found courage to request his permission that he might deliver to the Condesa two

letters for her, of which he was also the bearer.

“By all means, amigo, by all means,” returned the Conde. “I think that you will find her alone in her sitting-room below, and she will be delighted to see you.”

This was a fearful moment, indeed, so thrilling with the rapturous joy which it conveyed, that the agonised soul seemed to lose the consciousness of its very existence. With a trembling hand he struck the well-remembered door; the gentle voice from within all unwittingly conceded admittance, and once more he stood in her presence.

Doña Elvira, on beholding him, started back with a faint shriek, as if she had seen a spectre from the grave, and every vestige of colour having forsaken her lovely features, she muttered, in a scarcely audible voice, as she moved forward to meet him:—

“Speak, speak at once, Señor de Villafior: say, is it weal or woe for evermore?”

Our hero’s only reply was to place the fatal letter within her tremulous grasp.

She slowly opened it: one glance assured

her that it was the true, the sole, the all-dreaded original; and, with a piercing cry, she would have fallen senseless to the ground, had he not sustained her in his arms.

Once before the Señor de Villafior had thus upheld and enclosed in his embrace that frail and lifeless form: but then, it was to bear her away from the fiercest extremity of civil contention, while the stern trooper and the insensate citizen were pausing for an instant in their deadly strife, that they might gaze upon her inanimate, yet matchless beauty. Now, no one was present, no one was at hand, nor could any envious glance violate the congenial secrecy of that true love's chivalrous and respectful triumph. We trust, therefore, courteous reader, that, with the indulgence which you have vouchsafed to him as yet, you will not too hastily, or too harshly condemn our youthful hero for having recourse, in that hour, to a species of restorative, not unfrequently resorted to under similar circumstances; and, indeed, for having testified his sincere conviction in its efficacy by repeating it more than once. At all events, if success

can be held in any way to justify such proceedings, these should remain blameless; for scarcely had a whole minute elapsed, when the heavenly eyes were again unclosed in returning consciousness.

“What dream, what vision is this, so painful, and yet so joyous!” muttered Doña Elvira, attempting to arise.

“It is no dream, and no fancy, fairest of the creation,” whispered the enraptured Moriz in her ear. “Your champion is returned, your champion is at your side, and all the terrors that have so long blighted your peace and happiness are vanished now, like the baneful offspring of the nightmare, before the first early gleaming of the glorious dawn.”

The Condesa hastily pressed to her fair lips the martial hand of her protector, in token of her speechless gratitude, and then slowly but firmly extricating herself from his embrace, she moved towards her writing-table, where a lighted taper was burning, and applied the fatal but only token of her imprudence to the flame which would obliterate it for ever. Ere, however, that the fire could seize upon that

slender memorial of the past, she paused and pressed wildly to her lips the darkening traces of the fearful tragedy to which it equally bore witness. In breathless anxiety, Villafior watched the painful struggle which convulsed her heart and her countenance; but when her anxious glance sought his, as if to inquire there which were the more generous and the more rightful course, he could not but say—

“ Might not all that is dangerous be consumed, madam, while you still preserved this fold which would be unintelligible to all but to yourself?”

“ You have given a voice to my most secret thoughts, oh! my true champion,” responded she, as she fulfilled this welcome counsel. “ Now I am free,” continued she, as the all-purifying flame accomplished its office; “ now I am free as in the days when care and sorrow were yet unknown to me: may heaven visit me once more with all that I have lately endured if I forget ever to whom I am indebted for this priceless happiness. I must know all, however, Señor de Villafior, all, without any further secrecy or reserve, that we may determine how I can

best secure my generous preserver from the perils which I make no doubt that he has but too rashly incurred in my cause."

The Señor Moriz did not fail to comply with this injunction, and the obvious result of the short conference which ensued between him and the fair Condesa was, that every precaution should be taken to withhold from Don Diego, to the utmost of their power, any knowledge or suspicion of the great result which they had achieved.

If the utter and complete fulfilment of every human wish which he was conscious of having ever conceived, could have satisfied our hero's aspiring soul, he was assuredly happier at this than at any former period of his life. Though Doña Elvira did not fail, when any third party were present, still to simulate her former cold and somewhat sarcastic bearing towards him, how blissful was the compensation afforded to him by her languishing eye and by her faltering voice, whenever they could express, all unperceived, the true and secret feelings of the grateful heart. On the other hand, the confidence and affection of the veteran Conde were

more marked and more flattering than on  
whilst, singular and unaccountable as it might  
appear, no further trace of his recent estrang-  
ement could be discovered either in Maldonado's  
manner or conduct. Was he so absorbed in  
the important political events now daily occur-  
ring as to forget, for a time, the homeli-  
est concerns which had occupied his more leisure  
hours? was he thoroughly relieved from all  
transient doubts and misgivings which he  
lately taken such fierce possession of his soul  
was he convinced by his accounts from Madrid  
that Villafior had nowise availed himself of his  
short sojourn there to injure him? or had he  
deferred, to a more favourable time, the re-  
newal of his ruthless though unavowed conflict  
with his comrade? Upon these points, the  
ever watchful and acute judgment, both of  
Doña Elvira and of Villafior, was entirely  
baffled, until, satisfied at length with the re-  
sult, they ceased to inquire too minutely into  
the cause. Our friend Moriz had thus, as we  
have before said, every reason now to be com-  
pletely satisfied and happy. Whether he was  
so or not is a very different question, and a

which we must leave it to you, gentle reader, to decide. At all events, Fortune smiled sufficiently upon him, soon to render him somewhat recklessly oblivious of the perils which he had so rashly, or, should you prefer it, so generously incurred: an illusion which, alas! was not destined to be of many weeks' duration.

The first intimation which warned him that the fearful ventures that he had braved could not fail to bear with them some of their more direct consequences, was one day most unexpectedly conveyed by Maldonado, in such terms assuredly as to mark that all his suspicions were not entirely lulled to rest. Don Diego had received some letters from Saragossa at the very moment when public curiosity was raised to its highest pitch throughout Spain, as to whether the crafty Philip would remain satisfied with the results of the double victory which the Aragonese had achieved over his will and power, or whether, in the spirit of his august predecessor Isabella, he would avail himself of this opportunity of bringing at once to a definite issue these long conflicting claims. At this crisis, as we have said, Maldonado had

received letters from the very stronghold of the late insurrection, which enabled him to impart the foremost intelligence transmitted to Barcelona, that Antonio Perez had not been recaptured, and that the King was assembling such a force as would probably enable him soon to relinquish the temporising policy which he had at first been constrained to adopt. Great was the interest with which this momentous news was hailed by the principal inmates of the palacio, and many were the interrogations pressed upon him who had communicated it. When, however, their earlier excitement was somewhat allayed, the usual doubts and differences of opinion arose, if not as to the full authenticity of the accounts, at least as to the complete accuracy of the conclusions.

“Pray observe, madam,” said Maldonado, addressing the Condesa, who was ever the foremost among the sceptics, “pray observe that I only answer for two positive facts: first, that Antonio Perez is still at large; secondly, that Don Alonzo de Vargas is, by this time, at the head of twelve thousand Castilian

troops. Perhaps these may be destined for some foreign service; perhaps they are merely to support the very pretensions of the Aragonese chiefs, who are even now making such a show of resistance. Whether the prevalent impression at Saragossa with respect to the object of so great an armament may be correct or not, I will not take upon myself to affirm. In such times as these, every amount of misconception must be allowed for, and every kind of rumour will be afloat. Would you believe, Señora, that among the many statements circulated and credited in Aragon, there is one which attributes, in a great measure, the success of the last outbreak to the valour and energy with which the attack upon the prison was conducted by our friend here, Don Moriz de Villafior, followed by his trusty Aragonese page, the Señor Guzman?"

Happily for the Condesa, the attention which she was bestowing upon her tapestry work enabled her, in a certain degree, to conceal from Maldonado's searching glance the dismay which spread from her heart to her countenance when the last portentous words were uttered. As to

Dona Sirena most opportu  
rescue.

"Among all the extraor  
that I have ever heard of,  
wonderful," exclaimed she,  
hands in most unfeigned asto  
the Señor de Villafior shoul  
appeared at Saragossa, at t  
he was residing at Madrid."

"Ay, Señor," added M  
sinister smile, "and that, at  
he was lying so very ill at  
apartments, as to be seen by  
such rumours as these are be  
gated, well may we discredit a  
firmed to us by the evidence o

Impressive as was this fir

and more forcibly warned that his wary adversary was not much longer to be deluded. The untoward incident which led him to this inauspicious conclusion is so materially to influence the future fortunes of those whom it principally concerns, that it will be our duty, gentle reader, to submit to you a detailed account of it.

You are to picture to yourself our foremost personages, with the exception of the Captain-General, who was again confined to his apartment, once more seated at their evening repast and engaged in the animated conversation which the occasion and the hour generally promoted between them. You will remark no perceptible change in the usual bearing either of the Señor de Villafior or of the graceful Sirena; but you will observe a slight tendency, we will not say to irritation, but to impatience in the look and manner of the haughty Doña Elvira. This you are at liberty to attribute either to the indisposition of her favourite palfry, to the lamentable effects produced, shortly before, by the fall of her inkstand over her newest silken vesture, or to the pertinacity

with which Maldonado had insisted upon accompanying her, during her short afternoon promenade in the gardens of the palacio. As to the latter eminent individual, he had been much elated, during the whole day, by the accounts just received of the successful advance of the royal Castilian troops under Don Alonzo de Vargas upon Saragossa, which fully confirmed his former prognostications as to the ultimate fate of the Aragonese revolt; and never had our hero been more impressed by the thrilling tones of his voice, or by the simple but native eloquence of his language, than on that night, the last which he was destined ever to pass with him under that happy and hospitable roof.

"Well, I cannot believe," observed the Condesa, again recurring to the leading topic of their discourse, "I cannot believe that the Aragonese army, of which we have heard such formidable accounts, can thus have been dispersed without any serious struggle."

"I think that you will find, Señora," replied Don Diego, with his most triumphant smile, "that Don Juan de la Nuza, after having

caused no end of bells to be rung and proclamations to be issued in defence of the Aragonese franchises, and after having marched very boldly forward under the ancient standard of St. George, to meet the so-called Castilian invaders, thought better of the matter, when he beheld their whole array, and retired to his own castillo, leaving his army to fall back, as best they might, upon Saragossa. What resistance it will be able to achieve there now remains to be seen."

"Exactly," resumed the Condesa; "I cannot but remark, Señor Maldonado, with due deference to your superior judgment, that, as yet, in these unfortunate matters, the Aragonese have mostly had it their own way throughout. The Señor Perez has not been condemned, and is now as free as we are, while every privilege of Aragon has been, to this day at least, successfully upheld and vindicated."

"Very true, madam, very true; but now, if I mistake not, the real crisis is at hand; and what do you think will still remain of these vaunted privileges in two months hence?"

the example of his august  
great King is too judicious  
not to concede to the popul  
shown itself so strenuous to

“And so, madam, the la  
must now centre upon th  
anchorage indeed for a s  
They will shout, we know,  
they will plunder and burn:  
but is any yet so blind as to  
to their keeping? When  
occupied each street, and ex  
tion in Saragossa, who wil  
most clamorous to welcome  
him in triumph to the Alja  
rabble who would have as  
his maimed corpse though

days when they insulted, in the streets of Rome, the mangled remains of the greatest of mankind, or reviled, upon his ignominious cross, the dying Saviour of the world."

"Subjects have their faults and their follies I well know," resumed the Condesa; "but being, after all, one of them myself, I cannot but occasionally remember that they have also their qualities, their wrongs, and their woes. Such as they are, and must remain, what would a sovereign be without a certain amount of their sympathy and affection?"

"Say rather their allegiance, madam; and when you will have established how that is best secured, whether by love or by a wholesome degree of fear, you will have solved the true problem. Interrogate your own conscience sincerely, madam, and upon this and many similar matters you will find the safest and surest answer there."

"It has been made long since, Señor de Maldonado, by the very authority to which you appeal. It is ever to love that we yield most; it is to love alone that we grant all; and who that can be loved would ever court the

and his very voice so  
sarcastic, and almost fi  
replied, with affected ca

“He that is truly v  
to the results obtained,  
feelings inspired. Does t  
or care, respecting the  
his revolted pupil, so th  
and crouching under th  
Kings, or men, to vindic  
rity? What can love it  
subjection?”

At this galling obser  
cast upon her interrogato  
pressible and intense sce  
alone could express

"Better, a thousand times, are these, were they to remain for ever unrewarded, than to know no other sentiment than that of revenge, to excite no other feelings than those of aversion and contempt."

"Not contempt, madam, not contempt," cried the exasperated Don Diego. "We feel no contempt for those who have our fate in their hands, with whatever other sentiment we may affect to reward their forbearance in using their power."

"You are mistaken there, Señor de Maldonado; contempt is the sentiment which we entertain for the base traitor, who would destroy fame and happiness where he could not captivate affection. Even were we in his power, contempt would be our foremost feeling for the vile arts by which his still viler influence had been attained. What, then, would fill our soul, if that influence were at an end, and those arts powerless for ever?"

While the conversation between Maldonado and the Condesa had thus been insensibly assuming, since the withdrawal of the attendants, the ominous and menacing character

of its hidden causes, had  
ing progress of the long  
tion with almost equal  
after exchanging one rap  
gence, simultaneously aro  
the hope of arresting the  
warfare of words, which h  
unexpectedly broken for  
however, both antagonist  
imparted such secret wo  
have incensed to actua  
deeply estranged, and o  
injuries and sufferings;  
tagem devised by the  
terrified spectators could  
Diego and the Condesa  
but the former, drawing

torted the no less animated Doña Elvira.  
"False traitor! I defy you!"

At these words, uttered in a tone of almost enthusiastic confidence, the first distinct misgiving of all that had occurred crossed Maldonado's mind, and his swarthy brow grew as pale as death. Insensibly his searching glance wandered from the glowing countenance of the Condesa, to that of Villafior, who, now standing by her, seemed ready, at a single sign from her, to fell her unworthy adversary to the ground; and he exclaimed, with a hoarse laugh:—

"Ah! I understand the journey to Saragossa now. A second Fernando,—a second Fernando, though the fate of the first might have been a warning to all parties."

"No warning is required here, saving by you, Maldonado," said our hero, sternly thrusting back the imprudent reviler. "By Heaven! you would oblige me to forget the very respect which I owe to these fair ladies' presence."

"For God's sake, forbear," exclaimed Dona Sirena, rushing between the two cavaliers,

the name of Heaven  
stand between them  
but run to my uncle  
conciliate them."

Such was the rapid  
der-hearted maiden on  
well-intended errand,  
in time her youthful  
warned by her rapid  
and untoward was the  
given rise to it.

"We shall have our  
meeting elsewhere," she  
ever deeply concerned;  
had succeeded in retaining  
of self-possession; "and  
nado, that I will not  
mean it."

breathless Sirena reappeared, hastily crying out:—

“Don Moriz, Señor de Maldonado, the Governor requires your attendance immediately. Come, come; I am ordered to conduct you to him without a moment’s delay.”

Neither cavalier saw any other alternative than to follow so positive an injunction, conveyed by so fascinating a messenger; and no sooner had they reached the veteran Conde’s apartment, than he exclaimed:—

“What on earth is this, my masters? is civil war to spread even into our small family circle? Whether Vargas or La Nuza has carried the day, there is no reason why you two should draw your swords. Come, clasp hands there at once; and let me hear no more of this childish dispute, which has driven poor Sirena nearly out of her mind. Well, why do you both look so sullen, and as if my sciatica was now in your right arm?”

“I humbly trust that your excellency will excuse me,” said Villafior, respectfully; “but something has occurred between the Señor de Maldonado and myself which will require a

little explanation, ere our hands be again joined in our former friendship. I feel sure that your excellency will not have forgotten the days when you would not yourself have sheathed your sword in an unappeased and unsatisfied quarrel?"

"Perhaps not, amigo, perhaps not, where there was a just cause; but there can be none such between you two. This, however, you may be unwilling to acknowledge, ere the first heat of the dispute has cooled down a little. If you will but promise to adopt, or pledge yourselves to, no rash course during the next twenty-four hours, I shall feel perfectly satisfied that, ere then, you will be yourselves the first to laugh at your late childish excitement."

This engagement having been taken on either side, both the contendants withdrew; Maldonado to his apartment, and Villafior to join the Señore in the saloon. Finding, however, that they had retired, he, after a few moments' solitary reflection, determined upon following Don Diego to his room.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

WHEN our hero reached his comrade's chamber, he found him there alone, and intently engaged at his writing-table, upon which his sword and dagger were lying. On beholding him, Maldonado glanced rather anxiously at the latter, and would doubtlessly have seized one of them, if Moriz had not exclaimed, with a slight smile,—

“ I come not to renew our quarrel, at present, but merely to inquire, how far you think it may have been affected by the pledge which the Captain-General has required of us?”

“ I am perfectly willing,” replied Don Diego, “ to abide by your interpretation of it.”

“ Well, then, as I conceive, we shall be en-

tirely free to meet on the day after to-morrow, and to dispose of our differences as it most beseems two true caballeros. I suppose it would be useless on either side to state our differences?"

"Perfectly so."

"You shall yourself appoint the hour, the place, and the weapons."

"As you please."

"And hark, amigo, one word more in your ear: no more traitorous attempts upon my life, until we can meet upon a fair field, as you yourself wish for a cavalier's death."

"I am at a loss to understand your meaning," said Diego, with a ghastly smile; "unless it be to add senseless insult to unprovoked injury."

Villafior was about to make some hasty reply, when the outer door of the apartment was seen suddenly to open, and a spectral figure to emerge from the darkness behind, as if it were from its abandoned sepulchre. Our hero, intrepid as he was by nature, had his due share of the superstition of the times; and he was wholly unable to repress a movement of

deep dismay, when his eyes lit upon the pallid features of the murdered Luigi Davila.

"Gracious God! Maldonado," cried he, "whom have you here?"

"One whom the surgeon's art has redeemed from the very grasp of death," calmly answered Diego, while his dark eye scrutinized, with an intensity of attention peculiar to itself, the mutual bewilderment with which the two parties present were contemplating each other.

"I am happy to see you so well again, Señor Davila," said Villafior, as soon as he had recovered his self-possession; and, after having received from Maldonado the assurance that he should hear from him on the following day, he retired to his own apartment.

"I had sent for you, Davila," said Don Diego to this sinister personage, when he found himself alone with him, "I had sent for you to inquire whether you are so far recovered as to bear some confidential letters for me to Saragossa?"

"I am, Señor."

"Very well; they will soon be ready. But tell me," continued Maldonado, fixing again

...heard his voice

"Never so distinctly

"Ha!" muttered I

"You seemed startled  
voice scarcely less than  
beholding you."

"I was, Señor."

"Did its sound recal  
or circumstance? Nay,  
servedly to me, you know

"Well, Señor, I will s  
that voice among a hund  
place and not in your ch  
sworn that it was the self  
one of the bandits who s  
upon my horse."

"Well, Señor, it did strike me, just as I was losing all consciousness from the wound which I had received, that I overheard one party addressing the other in a whisper by the name of Guzman."

"You wounded one of the assailants, did not you? which do you think it was?"

"The latter, I should say, Señor."

Maldonado remained for a moment silent, and absorbed in the deepest thought, after which he resumed—

"Perchance I shall want you nearer me at present. You must find some safe hand to bear my letters to Saragossa, Davila, and meet me to-morrow morning by ten o'clock at the Señor Corregidor's."

Don Diego had not yet returned from this ominous conference when, on the ensuing day, our hero joined the two Señore at the hour of their morning repast. The death-like paleness which sat upon the fair Condesa's brow bore melancholy witness to the sleepless night which she had passed, as well as to the deep sorrow which still preyed upon her mind; and no sooner had they risen from table, than request-

ing Sirena to join her uncle for a few minutes, she invited the Señor de Villafior to accompany her to her garden.

"I think," said she, with a faint smile, "that the trees here have less ears than the walls, and that we shall be more secure from interruption, where we shall least appear to shun it."

The Señor Moriz eagerly followed his fair guide into one of the less secluded alleys of the orange groves which surrounded the palacio, but he did not address her until she herself commenced the momentous conversation.

"I need not tell you," she said at length, "how deeply I deplore what occurred last night. So sorely as I have been tried throughout, and as I was more particularly upon this fatal occasion, I know that my folly and imprudence admit of no excuse. What is said, however, cannot now be unsaid; what is done may not be effaced, and we have only to foresee and to regulate the consequences as best we may. You have promised the Captain-General that your quarrel with Maldonado, during twenty-four hours, will not be followed up; but

after that, what is to occur? Nay, for heaven's sake, spare me the additional torture of all these doubts and uncertainties. Tell me the whole truth, I beseech, I enjoin you."

"Well, madam," replied Villafior, much moved, "I will not conceal from you that Maldonado and I have exchanged such defiance as was meet and fitting after what has taken place between us. Still, I do not think it likely that he will be willing to cross swords with me. Sooner or later, madam, he must have discovered what I have been fortunate enough to accomplish, and that he should feel deeply aggrieved and injured thereupon is not to be wondered at. But his calmer reflection must convince him that nothing can be retrieved, while much more may yet be marred, by too open a contest with me. I cannot therefore, madam, too forcibly, or too sincerely entreat you to give yourself no further concern respecting a matter which will not involve any serious consequences."

"Ah! Señor de Villafior," sadly replied Doña Elvira, "you cannot delude me into such cheerfulness. That he will not dare to

measure his traitorous weapon with your knightly sword is highly probable; but you must remember the many means by which he can again imperil your life. My heart shudders when I think for whom and by whom it must thus be exposed!"

"I have provided for that case too, I think, madam; but even should some such venture still be my fate, allow me to remind you, that he who would not anxiously embrace and court it as a priceless blessing of heaven, would be all unworthy to be styled your champion."

"Speak not so, Señor de Villafior; I must not hear such language again. If, in a passing moment of forgetfulness, I have allowed you to claim that title, the object which you undertook to accomplish is now achieved; and the base taunt which that mean reviler proffered last night must remind me, even should nothing else, that the noble days when such appellations could in honour be given and borne are now no more. If you will not think of yourself, Señor de Villafior, think sometimes of me, and beware how you conjure up, under

another form, the very danger and misery from which you have rescued me."

Our hero earnestly gazed upon that speaking face, more surpassingly lovely in its anxious sadness, than in the brightest bloom of its most triumphant hour; and all exalted by the heavenly vision, no less than by the soul-stirring incidents of the previous night, he exclaimed:—

"All that I can perform, madam, I will promise, but no more. Of my humblest and most hopeless respect and deference, you will, with the blessing of God and of our Lady, never have just cause to complain; but the secret, the unavowed feelings which are become the very life of my heart, those are mine—mine alone, and I will no more relinquish them than I can subdue them."

"Exactly; I had feared as much," said Doña Elvira, but more, as yet, in sorrow than in anger. "When I told you from the first, that I accepted you as a champion in my utter distress, but never as a suitor, I should have known, I should have remembered, how easily you might be betrayed into for-

getting or overstepping so faint a line of demarcation. What I have just heard reminds me, even had I received no other warning, that we should part, Señor de Villafior, ere our ill-fated intercourse should lead to still more serious results."

"Part, gracious lady!" cried the unfortunate Moriz, in the deepest dismay; "that is impossible."

"It is a sad consummation, indeed, Señor de Villafior; yet, if you will reflect upon all that has occurred, all that is even now imminent, you must acknowledge, that in tendering this advice, I am best consulting your safety as well as my own."

As she thus spoke, the fair Condesa entered one of the sylvan recesses with which the noble garden was studded, and, as if exhausted with the fierce conflict of her feelings, she sank down upon the marble seat before her, and pressed her fairy hands to her throbbing and burning brow. Villafior gazed upon her for a moment in speechless sympathy and admiration, as all the bright, though unavowed day-dreams of his love faded fast before the lurid

and baneful light which was breaking upon his distracted heart; and then, excited beyond all control of reason, of reflection, and of conscience itself, by the fearful emergency so unexpectedly conjured up before him, he fell upon his knees at her feet, and poured forth the long repressed tale of his all-absorbing passion.

We will not attempt, gentle reader, to define or to retrace the wild paroxysm of that ill-starred hour. The Señor Moriz was then, as you know, in the full meridian of his youthful and ardent temperament. He had loved, he had worshipped the enchantress in whose sphere his lot had been lately cast, with all the hopeless but reckless devotion of his years and of his character. He had joyfully staked, for one of her smiles, each cherished object of his former ambition or desire. He had recognised, more than once, in her downcast eye and in her tremulous voice, those symptoms, which, while Hope scarce ventures to imagine, true Love cannot mistake. Was he now to part from her, the only light of his path, the sole aim and purpose of his being, and to be torn from her without relieving his over-burdened soul

by one transient but enraptured expression of its all irrepressible adoration. In vain did the idol attempt to withdraw from his grasp her trembling hand; in vain did she warn him, in hurried and broken accents, that it was criminal in her to listen to such language; nothing could arrest the torrent of his unloosed passion, until at length the Condesa, with a faint shriek, sprang to her feet. Her startled lover, whose face had been shrouded as yet in one of the folds of her flowing vestment, now gazed anxiously upon her countenance; and unutterable was his dismay when he beheld it glowing with every sentiment of indignation and of resentment.

“I have heard you so far, Señor de Villafior,” exclaimed she, in the tone of her sternest mood; “as I was curious to know to what extremity of imprudence and of forgetfulness you would be impelled during this extraordinary outburst. Now, listen to my answer. I consider that every single word which has just now fallen from you is a distinct and unprovoked insult to me, and that I should have fully deserved the malignant outrage offered

to me last night, if I consented again to admit you to my presence as long as you are thus oblivious of all that you owe to me and to our respective stations. Leave me now, Señor, leave me at once, and you may conceive yourself fortunate indeed, if, for the sake of by-gone circumstances, I withhold from your master and mine all knowledge of the dishonour which you have attempted to cast upon him as well as upon me."

Villafior watched, in speechless bewilderment, the haughty Doña Elvira while, after having passed this dread sentence upon him, she slowly retired in the direction of the palacio. He then proceeded himself to his own apartment, there to deplore the truly inconceivable rashness and folly with which he had addressed the proud daughter of the House of Haro, the spouse of his own chief, the Captain-General of Catalonia, as if she had been one who might have received and responded to such homage as his. Nor was it any solace to his wounded conscience to reflect, that she had accepted from him the venture of his life, and that, more than once, she had appeared to

smile upon his secret and silent passion. That passion was too ardent, too chivalrous, too youthful, not to apprize him fully of his own indignity, and not to exasperate, by its very influence, the tortures of self-reproach which he endured when he reflected upon all the happiness that he had so madly marred and forfeited. Poor Villafior! well indeed might he shed such burning tears as his childhood had never known; and not upon the past only, for already the dark clouds which had long been gathering over the faded horizon of his hopes were fast hastening to hurl their electric doom upon his devoted head.


Ere he had been scarcely an hour communing with his solitary grief, he received a hasty summons from the Conde: no sooner had he entered the veteran's apartment, and encountered his lowering gaze, than the new career of woe which was opening before him was fully revealed to him.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

"SEÑOR de Villafior," said the Captain-General, as he sternly glanced from the new comer to his youthful spouse, who was sitting behind him, pale and motionless as a marble statue, "you will prepare, this day, to bear some despatches for me to Madrid."

"To Madrid, Señor?" said the luckless Moriz, in a faltering voice.

"Yes, to Madrid; there to remain, or from thence to depart as may best suit your convenience, so that you never again cross the threshold of my house. Nay, I want no explanations and no excuses," continued the veteran, his rising indignation fast prevailing over his attempted



that you had well calculated  
such chances were no long  
among the consequences of a  
my grey hairs. Hark ye, how  
word in your ear: if ever  
mise or rumour of the true  
missal is so much as whist  
of Spain, or of Europe, y  
day, bid farewell to life as  
to honour. Now, begone  
Heaven, lest I should find  
sword-arm is powerless, I  
to the son of a gallant soldier  
of infamy which he has made  
soft, a moment. You also,  
thing doubtless to say to  
leaves our roof for ever."

warned her that her fate, and perhaps not hers alone, depended upon her apparently cheerful obedience to his implied wishes. She therefore said, with a desperate effort to recover some degree of calmness—

“ Señor de Villafior, you will surely not have forgotten that none had less reason than I had to welcome you to Barcelona. If, since then, in compliance with the Conde’s positive injunctions, and in accordance with my duty to all who serve and surround him, I have endeavoured to remove from your mind any unpleasant recollection of the incidents which marked our earlier intercourse, the purity and singleness of my intentions can never, I trust, have been for an instant doubtful to yourself or to others. I had not conceived, I had not imagined it possible, until this morning, that you, whose conduct towards every one here had invariably been marked by the strongest and most chivalrous sense of all moral obligations, could ever be betrayed into such lamentable oblivion of the respect which you owed both to the Captain-General and to myself. Now, however, we must

part:—all that I can venture to promise you is, that I will endeavour to forgive one brief moment of forgetfulness for the memory of the blameless past, and may God speed you on your way.”

Utterly overwhelmed as our hero was by each new circumstance of the fatal catastrophe which had befallen him, he could not retire from the presence of those who had thus addressed him without attempting some slight vindication or excuse for what had occurred. But one glance from the Condesa so impressively warned him of the fresh perils that he was thus incurring, and perchance creating for others, that he merely said to the Governor, as he withdrew from the room:—

“ I suppose that I shall best consult your excellency’s wishes by remaining silent at present. If, however, you will but condescend to read a letter which I shall take the liberty of writing to you, you will, I trust, feel cause to regret the undue severity which you have thought fit to show to a devoted and faithful servant.”

The Conde de Sierra Dorada responded

merely by an impatient inclination of the head, and the door thus closed upon the retreating form of the unfortunate Villafior.

"Come here, querida," then resumed the Governor, as he pressed his lips to the pallid brow of his wife. "You have said and done all that I could possibly require, and now you had better go to the adjoining room and take a little rest. By my faith! I can hardly wonder that these gallants' heads should be turned when they gaze upon your face; but I am all the more bounden to take due care of you."

"I fear," replied the Condesa, with a faint smile, "that you will never consider that duty fully discharged until you have safely immured me in the convent where I am finally to expiate my fatal error, in having intrusted this poor form to your keeping for life."

"Nonsense, child," answered her fond husband, again embracing her more tenderly; "it was but a passing and unmeaning expression, which fell from me in the first outburst of my wrath. But I descry Maldonado coming this way, doubtless with all the Corregidor's news,

and it would be as well that you should leave us alone together. But stay, what shall I say to him of what has occurred?"

"Perhaps you had better tell him what you wish him to hear, rather than leave him to ascertain or to conjecture more than he should know, or, perchance, more than has ever taken place. Remember, however," added the fair Elvira, raising her slight forefinger, "remember that all your information comes from me."

In compliance with his wife's advice and parting injunction, the veteran Conde took an early opportunity of apprizing his confidential secretary, though in the most guarded and most laconic terms, of what it would have been hopeless, indeed, to have attempted to conceal from him. He therefore told him that the Condesa having remarked something in the manner and language of Villafior which led her to suppose that his prolonged intercourse with her was incompatible with his peace of mind, the youthful equerry had just received orders to proceed forthwith to Madrid.

Don Diego was much too cautious to betray

either the secret gratulation imparted to him by this unexpected intelligence, or his eager curiosity for further detail, and he merely observed that his excellency had, doubtless, taken a very prudent step.

"Ah! you think so, amigo?" resumed the Conde, with a searching glance. "Have you ever remarked before now anything in confirmation of that opinion?"

"I, Señor? No; nothing particular. But then, to be sure, my friend Moriz is young, and tolerably well-favoured, while all must agree that Doña Elvira is surpassingly beautiful."

"Ay, amigo, that is it; and daily intercourse, however reserved, has its perils. But what on earth are you thinking of, Diego? You look as grave as the whole cabinet in council. Come, you know that I have a right to your secret thoughts."

"Well, if your excellency absolutely requires it, I must say, that I was reflecting whether so sudden a departure may not lead to some inferences or conjectures which it were as well at once absolutely to prevent."

"And pray how can that be achieved, amigo?" said the Governor. "I think it is a subject upon which most people will conceive it safer not to dilate; but still, in such a household as this, they will canvass, for a day at least, any new and unforeseen incident."

"Precisely, Señor, and that is just why I should wish them to have some more ostensible cause for my friend Moriz's dismissal to dis-course upon."

"Well, Diego, find some plausible motive, and we can then proclaim it. Now, I see by your countenance, amigo, that you are not quite at a loss."

"I entreat your excellency to remember," resumed the subtle Diego, in well dissembled hesitation, "I entreat your excellency to remember that this most imprudent youth is my intimate and particular friend."

"So much so, amigo," interposed the Conde, "that, but last night, I was obliged to interfere lest you should cut each other's throats under my very roof."

"Your excellency is pleased very much to exaggerate the only slight and very transient

difference which has occurred between us during nearly two years' most confidential intercourse. However, I trust that I am doing the young man no injury by merely preparing your excellency for a communication which you must this very morning receive from the Señor Corregidor."

"Most certainly not, Diego, and for heaven's sake, let me know at once to what it relates."

"Well, then, Señor Conde, the evidence collected by that excellent functionary respecting the murderous attack upon poor Luigi Davila, goes very far indeed as yet to incriminate my unfortunate friend Moriz and his page Guzman."

"Indeed, Diego!" replied the Governor, in the deepest astonishment. "Can that be possible?"

"Your excellency will have an opportunity of forming your own opinion as to the validity of the charge: with respect to myself, I must own that I shall not be very easily persuaded. However, as the matter now stands, I should deem that the youth's very best friends must wish that he should have an opportunity of

vindicating his character before his patrons at Madrid, both upon this matter, and from a still more serious accusation, which, I fear, awaits him there."

"Another accusation, Diego! What can you mean?"

"That, Señor, of having, with the same Aragonese page, Guzman, taken a very prominent part in the insurrection of the 24th of September, at Saragossa."

Ere the Captain-General's repeated injunctions had so far overcome the friendly scruples of the reluctant Maldonado, as to elicit from him some further insight into the forthcoming communication of the Corregidor, that officer was announced and immediately introduced. Into the details of the long and animated conversation which ensued between him, the Conde, and Don Diego, we need not too minutely inquire, as the knowledge of its fearful result will not long be withheld, either from our hero or ourselves.

Scarcely had Villafior completed the preparations for his departure, with such speed and order as the utter prostration of his spirit

might admit of, when the door of his apartment was suddenly cast open, and four alguacils having entered, arrested him, in the King's name, under a warrant signed by the Conde de Sierra Dorada himself. The ill-starred youth had just enough presence of mind left to remember that both remonstrance and resistance would be absolutely unavailing. He therefore merely endeavoured to obtain some insight into the charges which had been or might be preferred against him, and what he was enabled to gather was fully sufficient to show him that the most serious forebodings which he ever could have conceived were already fulfilled. Having then resigned his sword and his papers, and urged the unwilling Guzman to provide at once for his own safety, he followed his dark-browed conductors into one of the lower halls of the palacio, where they were to detain him in custody until further orders.

About the hour of sunset, Maldonado entered the apartment, and addressing the chief alguacil, delivered to him a despatch from Madrid, together with some secret instruc-

serious reverse, preparing  
without bestowing upon him  
of recognition, than his i  
sentiment prevailing over  
he exclaimed:—

“You have well chosen  
Diego, for depriving me of  
will go hard with me if I  
opportunity for calling you  
count.”

“You will find wiser as  
your ingenuity, if I mistake  
replied Maldonado, “in  
which you have already  
defying any fresh one.”

With these words, he  
drew when as if suddenly

are few, none perhaps, Villafior, in this world to whom I have offered as I have to you my most earnest and sincere friendship. Had you so willed it yourself, you would have been the companion of my life, the partner of all my cares and sorrows, the sharer of the brighter fortunes which perchance may yet dawn upon me. You have otherwise judged. In your boyish rashness you have chosen to stand between the tiger and his prey. While all was faith, while all was amity between us, you have dashed from my hand the cup of more than earthly happiness when already I had pressed it to my lips. And yet I would award no other retribution than the thought, which will never forsake you, that the very friend who would have conducted you to eminence, to wealth, and to renown, is henceforth the appointed avenger of your follies and your crimes."

There was something in the tone, as well as in the words of the speaker, which moved Moriz to sorrow, almost as much as to anger, and he replied with less asperity than before:—

"May your conscience, Diego, if you have

for, with such as you, it w  
indeed to discuss my conduct,

“Both will be soon appreci  
highest authorities in the r  
Maldonado, with his most sarca  
should they consider robbery,  
violation of every social tie  
honour and with good repute,  
would be Spain no longer.”

## CHAPTER XXV.

IN accordance, doubtless, with some secret instructions and purpose of Diego de Maldonado, our hero was conducted to Madrid by such short and easy stages that nearly a fortnight elapsed ere he alighted, with his sinister escort, at the door of the Secretary Moura's official residence. The object and circumstances of their arrival having been briefly explained to one of the principal attendants, they were shown into a lower hall or audience chamber, where Villafior long remained in sad reflection on the mournful changes which had occurred in his fortunes and prospects since he had last entered that very palace in all the hopeful pride of

his political career. One hour elapsed and then a second ere the privacy of the Secretary of State could be intruded upon for so trifling a matter; but, at length, the inner doors of the apartment were thrown open before Don Juan Idiaquez, as he retired from a prolonged conference with his colleague. A faint ray of hope struggled through the gloom which sat upon poor Moriz's mind when he beheld this courteous personage advancing, with his accustomed smile, towards the spot where he was himself standing; and forlorn and desolate as he felt, he could not forbear approaching to meet him, and respectfully claiming the honour of his attention for a moment.

"The Señor, if I mistake not—the Señor ———?" said the affable minister, in a tone rather of inquiry than of affirmation.

"De Villafior, may it please your excellency."

"Oh! to be sure. I crave your pardon a thousand times; in this uncertain light I had not recognised your features. Is your business urgent, or will not you rather favour me with a visit to-morrow?"

“With your excellency’s permission, the subject is most pressing, to me at least, for it concerns nothing less than my honour, and perhaps my life.”

“Indeed—I am much concerned to hear it,” resumed the Señor Idiaquez, a most chilling austerity fast replacing the former bland and gracious expression of his countenance. “Have you seen the Señor Don Christobal Moura?”

“No, Señor, not as yet.”

“Well, but, amigo, you are under his orders, and it is to him that you should apply—at all events in the first instance——”

“I am well aware of that, may it please your excellency, but having had the honour of meeting your excellency first, I was anxious to state to you that I have secret enemies at Court——”

“Indeed!” re-echoed the Minister, with the look of one who had received an admission of the gravest culpability.

“Yes, Señor, but I have friends too, who, thank God, can answer for my hereditary

honour and loyalty—Don Miguel Gurrea, the Duque de Villahermosa——”

“Is the youth dement?” exclaimed Idiaquez, in a tone of the deepest astonishment. “Why, my masters,” continued he, “if, as I begin shrewdly to suspect, you are his keepers, in some sense or another, for heaven’s sake let him see a trusty leech or chirurgion ere he be admitted to Don Christobal’s presence; in faith, these are no times for trifling with such matters,” and with this consolatory advice, the statesman hastily withdrew.

Before Moriz had had sufficient time to recover from the bewilderment into which he had been himself thrown by this abrupt farewell, an official, whose appearance he recognised full well, entered the hall and delivered some instruction in a whisper to the chief alguacil. Thereupon, our hero was summoned away to be conducted, not, as he had hoped and believed, to the Secretary Moura’s closet, but to the very prison of Don Benito de Cisneros, where, in happier days, he had himself beheld the first fearful example which he had witnessed of the vicissitudes of political

life. Villafior was well accounted brave both in spirit and in temperament; he had faced, from his earlier years, with a coolness and an intrepidity which had often been remarked, the many perils of a soldier's existence. We will not, however, undertake to say, that he was wholly unmoved when he traversed again that dark portal, of which he had never been able to think, in far different circumstances, without a feeling of awe, and when, after a short delay, he was introduced by the well remembered alguacil Zamora into the presence of no other personage than the redoubted Rodrigo Vasquez himself.

"Is this the Señor Moriz de Villafior?" inquired this stern functionary.

"It is, Señor," replied Zamora.

"Ah! well," resumed the judge, muttering impatiently to himself, rather than addressing either of the parties present, "I suppose that the matter must be proceeded with at once, as Don Christobal Moura seems to require expedition as well as secrecy. Call in Morales, will you, Zamora, and tell him to bring the papers respecting this case, which must be, if

possible, despatched to-night, as God knows that we have enough upon our hands for to-morrow."

It was the very room, the very same ill-omened officials, which Moriz had beheld before, on an occasion which he had reckoned the most awful and the most critical of his life, until the late sinister events had cast far back into the shade all the dangers and adventures of his earlier years. No wonder that his heart quailed, and that his cheek was blanched, for he well knew how little of human compassion those dark walls had ever witnessed.

When Morales appeared, he handed to the President, Vasquez de Arce, a series of papers or documents, the headings of which the latter read over in a voice which was audible enough to convey some notion to the prisoner of the care and subtilty with which the preliminary proceedings against him had already been conducted.

"Let me see what we have here:—'*Confidential Memorial, authentically setting forth the sympathy constantly expressed by Moriz*

*de Villaflor in favour of the attainted heretic, Antonio Perez.*—‘*Letters addressed to and received from the Duke de Villahermosa.*’—‘*Authentic deposition of Luigi Davila, charging, upon his oath, Moriz de Villaflor and his attendant, elsewhere designated, with having feloniously and traitorously attacked him, upon His Majesty’s high road, with intent to kill him and wrest from him certain important despatches addressed by His Excellency, the Conde de Sierra Dorada, &c. &c. to the Court.*’”—

“This witness is at hand, and awaits your excellency’s pleasure,” here observed Morales, in a whisper.

“Very well, it may be necessary to confront him with the prisoner. Now, what have we next—‘*Authenticated Statements of the prominent part taken by Moriz de Villaflor in the insurrection of the 24th of September, at Saragossa, drawn up and certified by competent witnesses, before the Señor Molina de Medrano, one of the Inquisitors of the Holy Office in that City.*’ Have any of these witnesses been sent to Madrid, Morales? It

might be necessary that they should attend, positively to identify the prisoner."

"Two of them have been despatched here by the Señor de Medrano, for this very purpose, may it please your excellency."

"You have looked into these papers, Morales?"

"I have, Señor Presidente."

"They are tolerably conclusive, I presume?"

"Completely so, in my opinion, Señor, if the witnesses adhere to their original statements."

"Then, we may as well proceed to the interrogatory at once. Take your seat there, and write down the prisoner's answers. You are the Señor Moriz de Villafior?" continued the stern judge, raising his voice as he addressed our hero.

"I am, Señor Presidente."

"You have long known the heretic, Antonio Perez?"

"I never saw him but once, may it please your excellency, and then for scarcely the space of a minute."

"I think that I can remember the circumstance," said Vasquez, sarcastically, "and you too, I dare say, Morales? There should be some record of it annexed to our minutes here."

"The whole incident is fully related in one of the accompanying papers, may it please your excellency," answered Morales. "The Señor was the bearer of a secret message from Gil de Mesa to Antonio Perez."

Moriz was about to offer some observation, but he was sternly warned by the alguacil, Zamora, that he was on no account to address the Señor Presidente, excepting in reply to some question from his excellency, who himself immediately resumed:

"Antonio Perez was your father's friend and patron, if I mistake not?"

"He was, Señor Presidente."

"You have felt and expressed throughout peculiar sympathy for the said Antonio Perez?"

"I have, Señor Presidente, without thereby, I trust, failing in aught to the duties which I

owe to His Majesty as a devoted subject and servant."

"That point must be decided hereafter by the written evidence which we have here. You have known the Duque de Villahermosa?"

"I have."

"Intimately?"

"Intimately, I dare not say, Señor Presidente; but I have been honoured by his special countenance and favour."

"Which you have requited by personal devotion?"

"I have, I trust, Señor, as far as lay in my power."

"Your sentiments for him have remained entirely unchanged during the recent events?"

"They have, Señor Presidente."

"*Habemus confitentem reum*," whispered Morales, with a slight smile.

"Yes, indeed, amigo," replied Vasquez, in the same tone. "It were well if all our customers showed equal discretion in sparing my time. Moriz de Villafior," then continued he, in a louder voice, "you have not preserved the whole of your correspondence with

the Duque de Villahermosa during the last eighteen months?"

"Some letters have been perchance mislaid, may it please your excellency; but I am not aware of having destroyed any."

"You were in the habit of communicating with him very unreservedly upon the condition of affairs in Catalonia?"

"Yes, Señor Presidente; at least upon such matters as I did not esteem to be of State secrecy."

"Well, now for the next count, for, by heaven! they are as plentiful here as bees in a hive. You are charged with having waylaid, grievously wounded, and despoiled of his despatches, one Luigi Davila, a State messenger; what have you to say on that head?"

"May it please your excellency, I would prefer giving no answer."

"I repeat my question—On the faith and honour of a cavalier, were you, or were you not, concerned in that foul deed?"

Poor Moriz was now sadly perplexed. Although he conceived himself pledged in nowise to reveal the whole truth, he had

never contemplated the notion of screening himself from any peril by affirming a deliberate falsehood. He, therefore, after a few seconds' hesitation, merely reiterated his former reply.

"Then, at all events, you do not deny the charge?" impatiently resumed Rodrigo Vasquez. "Set that down, Morales, and you, Zamora, introduce this Luigi Davila."

When Davila appeared, he deliberately reaffirmed, word by word, his written deposition, and identified Villafior as the person whose voice he had distinctly recognised.

"That will be sufficient, I think, Morales," said the Presidente, when this ceremony had been gone through. "Let me see, what motive is pointed at for this crime in the Confidential Memorandum?"

"The Señor Davila, may it please your excellency, was the bearer of information most invaluable to the insurgents, respecting the political condition of Catalonia, and the distribution of His Majesty's troops in that province," answered the attendant, after having glanced at the papers before him.

"Do you admit that to have been your motive, Moriz de Villafior?" inquired Vasquez.

"Certainly not, Señor Presidente."

"Have you any other to allege?"

"None that I could state, Señor Presidente."

"So I should conceive; but we shall see more of that later. Now for the Saragossa business. On your word, as a Spanish cavalier, Moriz de Villafior, were you present in that city on the 24th of September last?"

"I will not deny it, Señor Presidente."

"That, I should deem, would be perfectly useless. With what purpose and intent were you there?"

"I may not say," calmly answered Moriz.

"We shall see that anon," resumed Vasquez.

"Zamora, call in the two witnesses from Saragossa."

The former of these, when introduced, affirmed, in accordance with his written deposition, that, being a baker of the town of Saragossa, and standing upon the threshold of his own house, he had, at the very outbreak of the insurrection, beheld the Señor Gil de Mesa, whom he had long known by sight, accost a

young stranger by the title of the Señor de Villafior, equerry to the Captain-General of Catalonia, and combine with him the attack on the prison of the Manifestados. Upon a question to that effect from the President, this witness identified our hero as the very cavalier presented by that name to the mob, and enthusiastically saluted by them, under the auspices of Gil de Mesa.

The second personage who appeared on the part of the Señor Molina de Medrano, stated himself to be a subordinate official of the aforementioned prison, who, having seen the Señor de Villafior and his page, Guzman, during a short sojourn in Barcelona, of which city he was a native, had been enabled to recognise them both among the assailants who had delivered Antonio Perez. This evidence was also re-affirmed upon oath.

"Have you anything to say, Señor de Villafior, in consequence of what you have just heard, or in answer to it?" then resumed Rodrigo Vasquez.

Moriz proceeded to reply, by a detailed and most accurate statement of the untoward

circumstance which had led him to be, not a participator in the insurrection, but a forced and most unwilling spectator of its origin.

The stern President listened in silence to this simple and earnest relation, with a smile of the most sarcastic incredulity, and then observed :—

“ It is singular, Morales, how every popular outbreak, when it succeeds, has invariably almost as many leaders as there are parties concerned, while, if it fails, every one is the victim of the enthusiasm of others, every one was forcibly enrolled by some mysterious and preternatural agency. Perhaps it were as well that you should show, Moriz de Villafior, some plausible motive or pretext for this secret and all unavowed journey of yours to Saragossa, of which none of those whom you were serving had the slightest knowledge or conception. You say that it was entirely unconnected with political affairs?”

“ Completely so, may it please your excellency.”

“ Then, for heaven’s sake, or rather for your

own, do give some intelligible reason for your presence at Saragossa at such a time?"

"I am unwilling to state any false motive, may it please your excellency, and I may not allude to the true one."

"Oh! I suppose the honour of some fair lady is concerned," remarked the President, with his most sardonic smile.

"I entreat your excellency to observe," replied Moriz, hastily, "that not a syllable that has fallen from me can have conveyed any such impression."

"Very well, amigo, very well—the inference was mine, so that you may spare your energy, of which you will have some need presently. Let me see what you have noted down, Morales. Here, look over this letter of the Secretary Moura's, and tell me if you think we have now what is required. But soft, one question more, Moriz de Villafior: when did you see Antonio Perez last?"

"When he was escaping from the prison at Saragossa; that is to say, I think I recognised him then among the crowd."

"On the word of a cavalier, you do not know where he is or may be now?"

"I have not the slightest conception," firmly replied Moriz.

"Very well," said the President, and he proceeded to read over, with great care and attention, the minutes just drawn up by Morales. A short conversation then ensued, in a whisper, between these two functionaries, after which the President Vasquez de Arce resumed, in a louder and more impressive voice—

"Moriz de Villafior, I find that the very two points upon which you have declined to give a positive answer, namely, your motives for seizing the despatches of Luigi Davila, and for being subsequently present at Saragossa, are those upon which it is most necessary that the government of His Majesty should receive precise information at this most critical period. I suppose that I need not inform you that you have already incurred an amount of His Majesty's displeasure which you will find it hard indeed to endure, and that nothing short of actual insanity could prompt you any further

to provoke his regal severity. Have you nothing more to add to what is here noted down?"

"Nothing, may it please your excellency."

"In commiseration for your youth and inexperience," replied the judge, "I will give you five minutes more to reflect upon the awful extremity which you are defying,—after which, should your life or one of your limbs be sacrificed that the true ends of Justice may be vindicated, you will have none to blame but yourself."

With these solemn words, the redoubted President arose, and slowly retired from the apartment.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

DURING the short space of time thus allotted to him for so momentous an internal deliberation, the hapless Villafior remained with his head buried in his hands, as they rested upon the rude table before him; and while he was unable to mature one clearly defined thought, a whole life of mental agony seemed to flit through his distracted brain. At length, he was rudely aroused by Zamora, and he then saw that the President Vasquez de Arce had re-entered the room, accompanied this time by a personage whose appearance and costume very clearly bespoke his office.

The questions which he was called upon to

answer were again repeated, and no more precise reply having been elicited, Diego Ruiz, the dread questionnaire of Madrid, was called upon to perform his duty.

"You little know the doom which you have voluntarily provoked," said the President, with something nearer approaching to pity in his look than was habitually seen there.

"I am prepared for the worst," answered Villafior, in a calm though not unfaltering voice. "I am prepared for the worst that my strength can endure, as honour and honesty alike forbid me to comply with your excellency's commands. May heaven forgive those who devise and employ these fearful means of wringing from human weakness what the human conscience may not concede."

Vasquez's sole reply was a well-known signal to Diego Ruiz, whereupon this sinister functionary, with the aid of two of his assistants, produced the ladder, the rope, and all the fatal apparatus of the torture, then well known and frequently used in Spain, under the appellation of the Suplicio del Cordel, and they bared to the waist their unresisting prisoner. His

hands having been secured in the rope, the first turn was given, and the questions were repeated; but the thoughts of her in whose name and for whose honour this suffering was endured, steeled his native resolution, and no answer was given.

The same ceremony was repeated, after the second and third turn, but with no more successful result.

At the fourth turn, the agony of the tortured arms, which now shot through the whole body, having increased to the utmost power of human endurance, the unfortunate youth shrieked for mercy in the name of every saint revered throughout Christendom; but no sooner was the anguish suspended for a moment, than he again declined to comply with the only terms upon which he could now be released.

When the fifth turn was given, "Holy Mother of Heaven!" exclaimed the sufferer, "if you are men, if you are Christians, let me die any other death than this!—— I know that your tortures have been devised so cunningly as to overpower all human resistance

——Already my right arm must be broken——  
Oh! forbear, if you hope yourselves for the  
mercy of God!——”

As we trust, gentle reader, that we have succeeded in inspiring you with some slight interest in the fate of our not unerring hero, we will not harrow your feelings with any more detailed account of the fearful scene which was here enacted. It will suffice to say, that the unfortunate Moriz endured, without revealing aught of his treasured secret, nine distinct turns of the cordel, when exhausted and overtaxed nature finally gave way, and he became utterly insensible. The usual restoratives were applied, but his was not the transient swoon of a youthful beauty, as she beholds a drop of her blood starting from the slight scratch of her bodkin: it was the complete prostration of all manly and vital energy under the last extremity of physical and mental agony. Nearly half an hour elapsed without bringing with it any symptom of returning consciousness, and the ruthless officials were constrained to suspend all further proceedings for the night.

On the following day, ere Villafior had as yet sufficiently recovered from the violent shock which his whole frame had received, to regain a distinct perception of what was passing around him, he heard a well-known voice at his ear, and discerned the faithful Bolea, who had stolen, with a noiseless step, up to the pallet-bed where he was lying. So altered was our hero by the sufferings of every description which he had undergone since they had last met, that the honest escribiente gazed for a moment upon his features, as if uncertain of their identity, and then burst into tears.

"I thought that you would come, Francisco," muttered his companion, faintly; "I cannot extend my hand, for my arms are so powerless that they no longer show obedience to my will, but my heart truly welcomes you."

"How can this have happened; it is too sad, too horrible?" earnestly inquired Bolea.

"It is not much more, Francisco, than you yourself foresaw and foreboded from the first," replied Villafior, with a faint attempt at a

smile. "But you know that I would be wiser than you, wiser than all—and now, I have my reward."

"Yet, surely all cannot be forfeited, all cannot be lost?" anxiously interposed Bolea. "I shudder when I think of the charges which they are endeavouring to substantiate against you—but these certainly cannot be either proved or founded."

"Alas! Francisco," answered his companion, mournfully shaking his head, "I am guilty of all, or nearly all before men, in fact or in appearance, though, God knows, neither in spirit nor intention!"

"Gracious heaven! Moriz, who or what can have induced you to incur such awful ventures?"

"It matters not, Bolea—it matters not. Never inquire more, for my honour, and not mine only, is at stake, and I would die as I have lived——"

"Now, by the soul of the Cid, this is downright madness, Moriz. I must and will know how you can yet be redeemed from this fearful extremity. When I saw you last, you

were, as you assured me then, on terms of the most intimate friendship and good-will with all at Barcelona. Surely, none there would allow you thus to be sacrificed. The Conde's affection for you was that of a father, and you cannot have estranged him."

"I have, Bolea, absolutely, irrevocably."

"Then your friend, Maldonado——"

"Name him not," interrupted Villafior, with a slight shudder: "he is my bitterest, my deadliest enemy."

"Ah! Santa Maria, this is fearful news indeed, for he has many evil associates here. But the Condesa, amigo—the fair Condesa—I have a shrewd misgiving that she is at the bottom of all this. She has many powerful friends, much influence of her own, and she cannot be so base, so heartless, as to abandon, in their distress, those whose services she has used, but may no longer require."

"Francisco de Bolea, never malign her," eagerly exclaimed our ill-starred hero. "She is all that is most worthy of devotion and of worship under heaven; but I have nought to expect from her, saving well merited censure

and remonstrance. I fear that I have offended her more deeply than any."

"Then may God have mercy upon you," cried the astounded Bolea, in absolute distraction. "Of all the follies against which we separately and distinctly warned you, you have neglected none, no not one. May Heaven, I say, protect and defend you, for you have alienated every friend, and conjured up every foe that could well be devised."

"I am aware of it, amigo," said Moriz, bitterly; "and can only say, that I am resigned to the worst."

"You may be, but by Heaven, I am not!" replied the warm-hearted Bolea. "Nothing will persuade me, that so awful a tragedy can be fully carried out. Say, is there no one who could assist me in my humble efforts to rescue you from this fearful doom?"

"I know of none, Francisco," answered Villafior, sadly; "saving it were, perhaps, the Duque de Villahermosa, or Don Miguel Gurrea."

"Santa Maria!" cried Bolea, "what are you saying, my poor Moriz? Are you not

aware of what has occurred; how your unfortunate patron, with many of the highest and noblest in Aragon, has just perished on the scaffold?"

"On the scaffold—the illustrious, the kind-hearted Duque de Villahermosa? oh! it cannot, cannot be! When last I saw him, Bolea, he was endeavouring to enforce the royal commands upon his insurgent countrymen."

"Ay, that may be, but having been guilty of that moderation, which, in times like these, estranges both parties, he has finally fallen a victim to the resentment of the monarch, whose cause he did not uphold with sufficient zeal. Such has also been the fate of Don Juan de La Nuza."

"Don Juan de La Nuza, the Justicia Mayor of Aragon, beheaded on the scaffold?"

"Yes, amigo," replied Bolea, "and you may reckon that with him all the privileges of the Aragonese have perished for ever."

"Ah! Maldonado, Maldonado, I see that you were a true prophet after all," muttered Villafior. "I can now comprehend likewise, why such astonishment was manifested, whenever I,

yesterday, mentioned the poor Duque de Villahermosa's name. Oh! my amiable, my gracious protector, I will weep for thy untimely fate, though their tortures should wring no other tears from me. But Don Miguel Gurrea, Francisco; surely he can have taken no part in the civil war?"

"That is his very crime, amigo," said Bolea; "but I trust that he has succeeded in escaping, with no other loss than that of his pictures, and a part of his fortune."

"Well, Francisco, they were, with yourself, the only persons at Madrid, whom I might venture to call my friends. You must see, as clearly as I do, what I have to expect."

"And yet I will not, I cannot despair. I remember your telling me, that your father had formerly known the Duque d'Uzeda, and had even saved his life. He is lately returned to Madrid, and I shall ascertain at least what can be obtained from him."

Villafior was about to urge that this illustrious grandee, being Doña Elvira's own uncle, was the very last person whose friendly intervention could properly be claimed. But the

stern Zamora having here entered, and warned Bolea that he could not possibly allow any further intercourse with the prisoner, the warm-hearted escribiente, who had only obtained admittance as an especial favour and exception, and by dint of the most strenuous exertions, was constrained to retire forthwith.

In the course of that evening, Villafior was rudely aroused by his attendants from a state of slumbering unconsciousness, and conducted again into the dread presence of the grim Rodrigo Vasquez de Arce. There, the same questions, which he had refused to answer on the former evening, were solemnly reiterated, and no further reply having been elicited, the questionnaire was once more summoned to perform his ghastly office. So enfeebled, however, were now both the frame and the mind of the victim, that, at the very first intense pressure of the twisted cord upon his benumbed and maimed limbs, he relapsed into a state of utter insensibility, which defied all the ingenuity of his persecutors.

During the remainder of the night, he lay

upon the pallet, where his inanimate form had again been deposited, without giving any sign of returning vitality, and when, by daybreak, his eyes were seen slowly and painfully to open, their fixed gaze was no longer enlightened by the beams of intelligence or perception. His over-excited mind had evidently given way before the combined agency of so many fearful sufferings and emotions, and the few disconnected words which would escape from his lips, spoke only of the bewildered spirit's confusion. Often he was heard to repeat the names of the Duque de Villahermosa, or of Doña Elvira, but when each of these was indistinctly muttered, a thrill of horror would be seen convulsing the prostrate frame, as if the fearful doom of the ill-fated grandee, or the still more awful resentment of the Condesa, were ever present to the distracted mind of the sufferer. Towards evening, this agitation progressively increased to a state of actual and permanent delirium, until at length every indication of a violent fever in the brain was plainly revealed.

We will not dwell, courteous reader, upon

this afflicting and prolonged scene of human infirmity and of mortal anguish. It was not until the tenth day after they had parted, that Moriz was again enabled to see the faithful Francisco, and to learn from him that the very sufferings which had most imperilled his life, had perchance contributed to save it.

"I have but five minutes to stay with you, amigo," whispered his excellent friend, "and for these I am especially indebted to the courtesy of Zamora. Now, listen attentively to me. I have seen the Duque d'Uzeda, who, though at first peculiarly unwilling to interfere in so delicate a matter, has latterly given me the most invaluable countenance and support. This is what we have obtained. As you are possessed of secrets which it may much interest His Majesty's advisers to discover, but which you are unable at present to disclose distinctly, in consequence of the state of your health, no sentence can be executed or will be passed upon you for the present."

"But, Bolea, I possess no such secrets," muttered, in a faint voice, the half unconscious Villafior.

"It matters not, it matters not," eagerly resumed his friend in a whisper. "Do, for Heaven's sake, mi querido, endeavour so far to recal your wandering thoughts, as to comprehend and to fulfil the sole and frail condition upon which all must now depend. You must be supposed to possess such a secret, and to be now powerless to reveal it; the prisons of Madrid are full; every day new victims are hurried within their crowded walls, and we have succeeded in gaining permission that you should be, under the advice and care of some medical authority, removed from hence to the Tower of Segovia. There, at least, you will no longer be within the immediate sphere of Vasquez de Arce, and may perchance be entirely overlooked and forgotten until some more auspicious day shall dawn. Do you understand me, amigo?"

"I do, Bolea," answered Moriz, attempting to press the hand which still held his own.

"Do you clearly and distinctly see how important it is that you should proceed, so soon as you possibly can, to Segovia—that you should be most cautious in maintaining

the impression that you have some revelations to make—that you should not apparently recover the full use of your health and faculties for some time to come—and, above all, that you should say or do nothing that could remind any person in office of your existence?”

“Yes, Francisco, I do.”

“Very well, amigo, I must leave you now, and within three days, I trust, you will be on your way to Segovia in a horse litter. Farewell, and remember that you have one at least here, who will be night and day at work in your cause.”

## CHAPTER XXVII.

VILLAFLOR's mournful progress to Segovia was accomplished, though slowly and painfully indeed, according to the judicious intentions set forth above by his most excellent and efficient friend. In due course of time, he arrived at the portals of the well-known tower, where so many bright prospects of political prosperity had been, and were again to be, shipwrecked like his own, and he was delivered, by his stern attendants, into the closest care and keeping of the governor of the prison.

Mindful of Bolea's parting injunctions and advice, our hero was most cautious in keeping up every appearance both of physical and of

mental prostration; nor indeed, was he constrained much to simulate that he might convey to those who beheld him a sufficiently alarming impression of the condition to which he had been reduced. The paleness of death itself still sat all unbidden upon his features; his right arm, which had suffered the most, was completely paralysed; his left hand was almost powerless; so exhausted was his whole frame, that he felt as unwilling as he was unable to quit his lowly couch, and his mind was no less incapable than his body of any effort or exertion. Thus he remained, for more than two months,—a deep cloud of undefined affliction and terror still overshadowing both the melancholy past and the desolate future, while nought was left to sustain him in his gloomy struggle but that last vague instinct of self-preservation, which is imparted by the Creator to each animated being as a condition of life itself.

At length, one faint glimmering of hope struggled through the fitful darkness which hung over that bed of deep suffering, and of still deeper sorrow. A letter was delivered

to him open from Bolea, apprizing him, in guarded and laconic terms, that his case had been withdrawn from the list of those which were most urgently and most expeditiously to be followed up, and that if his health and strength were in any way returning, he need no longer subject himself, quite so rigorously as heretofore, to the precautions which had been, and still were recommended to him. This advice, coinciding as it did with a slight improvement in his general condition, which was besides not a little promoted by the intelligence itself, determined Moriz to make some endeavour to shake off the languor which had so long enthralled and oppressed all his vital faculties. He arose daily from his couch, resumed some care of his personal appearance, partook somewhat more freely of the scanty and frugal cheer allotted to him, and even occasionally demanded and obtained permission to breathe the pure air of heaven for a few minutes upon one of the battlements of the fortress.

Alas, however, the more he attempted to return to the pursuits and habits of healthful life, the deeper was the consciousness he felt

and endured of all that he had irretrievably forfeited and lost. Until the last fatal events, human existence had appeared to his youthful and ardent imagination but as a bright and glorious field opening before him for the mere use and display of his manly energies, and where each successive day of the brilliant future was to be marked by some fresh progress in honours, in preferment and in renown. Where were now all those glowing visions—where were those regions of unutterable and unimagined bliss ever expanding on the horizon of his hopes, and to which his eager soul was so confidently urging its precipitous course? Nothing, nothing, before him now, in the whole range of his earthly career, but the traitor's dishonoured doom. The contrast was too awful to be dwelt upon: he would close his eyes and press his hands to his burning brow, as if to escape from the dread reality; but it was all in vain.

In these desolate hours, one recollection, though one alone, of all the hapless past, would impart some slight consolation to his despairing heart. At least, he had succeeded, through-

out the fearful ordeal which he had traversed, in withholding from all, the slightest knowledge of the secret which, in happier days, Doña Elvira had committed to his knightly keeping. True it was that he had slight guerdon enough to expect now from her to whom he had sacrificed all; for the reckless imprudence with which he had so deeply offended her by the insane declaration of his unsanctioned and guilty passion had, doubtless, cancelled, in her eyes, any previous obligation. And yet, proudly conscious as she was of all the worldly distinctions which had exalted her into a sphere so far above his own, unwilling as she might be, and unable as she certainly was, after what had occurred, to show any marked interest in his fate, it could not be, even in her haughty nature, to reflect, without some slight sentiment of pity, upon the untoward destiny and the cruel penalty which had visited one whom she herself had more than once styled her own champion. Though the varied incidents of the last two years might well have taught poor Villaflor some experience respecting the secret workings of the heart among

the great and powerful; though he was ready enough now to place small reliance upon the princes and rulers of mankind, the fairer portion of the creation were still, in his eyes, endowed with none but the brighter attributes of their celestial origin. How, then, could he ascribe one single unworthy motive to the fairest and most peerless among these? How could he entertain for a moment that chilling surmise of the irritated Bolea, that, after having used and even courted his assistance, in the hour of her need, she had abandoned and rejected him, upon the very first opportunity, when his services could no longer be required, and when his presence at Barcelona could only tend to embarrass and to compromise her?

In that happiest hour of all the blissful past, when, after having returned to the fair Condesa her actual and original letter to her cousin, he had supported, in his arms, all alone and unperceived, her gentle and inanimate form; one of the silken knots with which her dress was ornamented had fallen to the floor and had been then secured, as well as

treasured ever since, by our enamoured hero. It was a small bow of entwined ribbons, worked with many a braided thread of gold, of silver, and of silk, to the colours of the illustrious house of Haro, which the lovely Elvira was fond of wearing in memory of her chivalrous ancestry. This now priceless love-token Moriz had been so fortunate as to conceal, to wrest, or to redeem, by constant exertion and vigilance, from the searching glance or the iron-grasp of the various alguacils through whose hands it had been his lot to pass; and we will leave you to judge, gentle reader, of the devotion with which it was now daily and almost hourly addressed and worshipped. Who that has not endured himself the weary and lonesome monotony of the prison chamber, where the very air we breathe seems itself exhausted and oppressed by the sense of its own confinement; who can tell the treasures of affection, of sympathy, of endearment, which will be wasted upon the slightest record of the bright regions of freedom without? But what, if this very record once rested near the heart of her whose smile had long been the only law which

our own had recognised? What if it were all that we could ever possess, all that we were ever again to see of her for whom everything had been cheerfully sacrificed—can we affirm that, at Villafior's age, and in his position, we should have shown ourselves much wiser than he?

During many months, this little relic, with all the blissful recollections which it embodied, was his only solace, his only companion. Not, we must say, that Moriz was treated with an undue or extraordinary degree of severity; for there was none among the prisoners to whom the veteran governor was more willing to extend any slight indulgence from the rigid rules of the prison. But still, a whole hour's walk upon the battlements, or some small accession to the homely rations of his appointed fare, was all that could be conceded without a special order from Madrid. An unexpected circumstance, however, at length occurred which imparted a new and slight interest to his lonesome existence. As he was descending one day from his melancholy promenade to return to his cell, he be-

held in the hall which he had to traverse, a young countrywoman, whose features he recognised, though he could not recal her name. Seeing that she gazed intently upon him, he inquired of the keeper who accompanied him, who she was, and was informed that she was his sister-in-law.

"May I address a few words to her?" said our hero.

"Yes," replied the alguacil, glancing hastily around; "but you must be brief."

"I think we have met before, Señora?" resumed Moriz, as he more nearly approached the aldeana.

"Oh! yes," answered she, with tears standing in her eyes, "and who would have thought that I should ever have seen you here? Do you not remember Anita Serral, whom you presented to the Señora Condesa de Sierra Dorada?"

"To be sure," exclaimed Moriz. "Are you lately come from Barcelona?"

"Yes, Señor. Your cell-keeper's sister, who married my brother, has come within the last week to see her family, who lives here without,

and brought me with her. We are to return to Catalonia within a few days, but I hope to come back here in a month or two."

"Were all well at the palace of Barcelona when you left, Anita?"

"Yes, I believe so, Señor. When last I saw the Señora Condesa, which is now some little time since, she was riding with that singular and most entertaining caballero, whom I met that day in your room."

"Ah! Maldonado? Indeed!" muttered Villafior. "Did she seem well and happy?"

"Perfectly so, Señor, as far as I could judge."

"Now, Señor," interposed the keeper. "It is as much as my place is worth to allow any further conference."

"One word more, amigo—only one word, and I will duly requite the favour some day, if ever I can. Anita," resumed he, drawing the pretty visitor aside—"I see in your eyes that you bear a woman's heart there within, and that you would serve, if you could, one whom fortune is sorely persecuting."

"That I would, most blithely!" answered the anxious girl.

"Then, when you return to Barcelona, you will mention to none that you have met me here—to none saving to the Señora Condesa. You will try to approach her upon some indifferent matter, and you will tell her, incidentally, in conversation, that you saw me here. Mind you then observe well, and report to me when you return here, her look and manner; for we parted in anger upon some political difference, and I should be glad indeed to hear that she bore me no resentment. Should she inquire if I sent any message, you will say, that all I lament is her displeasure, and that I will live and die faithful to the cause which I espoused at Barcelona. You understand me, querida?"

"Oh! perfectly, Señor, and you may depend upon me as if I were your own sister."

"I feel sure of it, Anita. Now, farewell!"

The excitement produced on the mind of Villafior by this trivial circumstance, the recollections which it recalled, the expectations

which it raised, contributed more to the restoration of his health and spirits than anything which had yet occurred since his detention at Saragossa. He felt anew as if there was yet something in life to hope for, something for which to contend;—as if he were again placed in communion with her who alone absorbed all his thoughts;—and that each weary day, as it passed by, brought him nearer to that upon which he would learn that his message had been delivered to Doña Elvira, perchance even receive some response from her. At length, about the promised time, his keeper informed him one morning that Anita Serral was returned, and that she would meet him for a few minutes on his way to the battlements.

When, at the appointed hour, Moriz beheld his fair messenger, and moved forward to greet her, his tremulous voice well betrayed the internal conflict of his emotions.

“You have been at Barcelona, Anita?” said he.

“Yes, Señor.”

“Are all well there?”

"All, Señor, saving the Captain-General, whose health does not improve."

"You remembered my directions, Anita?"

"Oh, yes, Señor, perfectly!"

"And you saw—you saw the——"

"The Señora Condesa; certainly."

"Well, mi querida, tell me what occurred?"

"I went to present her with some flowers, Señor, and, in conversation, I said that I was just returned from Segovia, upon which I thought she coloured slightly, but she replied nothing. I then added, that having been to visit the prison, I had accidentally met you."

"Well, Anita, and what did she say then?"

"At first, she merely said, 'Indeed?' But she afterwards inquired if misfortune and confinement had preyed much upon your youth and comeliness?"

"And you replied, Anita?"

"That, at first, Señor, I had hardly recognised you, as you looked more like your sister than your former self, but that still—in short——" concluded the half blushing and half smiling girl—"I cannot exactly repeat what I said."

"Did you, at least, deliver my message, Anita?"

"I did, Señor, most faithfully."

"And what was her reply?"

"Well, Señor, she heard me most graciously throughout; and, when I paused, she looked aside, and pressed her handkerchief to her face, as I then thought, to wipe away a tear. But, after a moment's silence, she turned fiercely round, and exclaimed: 'What mean you, minion, by this insolence? Who authorized you to bear such a communication from a discarded equerry to a daughter of the house of Haro? However, as it has been delivered, you may tell him that sent it, that I trust he will learn, where he now is, the respect which he owes to those who move in another sphere than his own.' But shall I tell you all, Señor, for you seem grievously distressed?"

"Oh! it is nothing, querida," muttered Villafior.

"Well, the Condesa then added: 'You may also say to those who have employed you, and remember yourself, that should any such

message again be brought to me, I will have the bearer whipped round the garden of the palacio."

"Ah! said she so, in truth; and what did you reply?"

"I fell at her feet, and entreated her forgiveness, which was finally granted, but only on condition that I would never again mention your name to her, and that I would report to you all she said."

"And have you fully complied with the injunction, now?" calmly inquired our hero.

"I have, Señor."

"Then farewell, Anita, and accept all that I can now offer—my best thanks. But what is it, my poor girl? You are all in tears."

"Oh! I was only reflecting, Señor," resumed the weeping aldeana, "how sad it is that one such as you should have thus mortally offended so noble and lovely a lady."

"Think no more of that, querida, for you, at least, have done your best to reconcile us."

The shock which this intelligence imparted to our youthful hero was fearful indeed. Again the faint light which had cast its blissful ray

upon his dreary path was utterly withdrawn; again his utmost ingenuity was unable to discern, in the desolate expanse before him, one single aim, one single hope. In vain was the veteran governor of the fortress kinder and more considerate to him than ever; in vain did Anita Serral and her relatives neglect no opportunity of forwarding to him every little rustic tribute of their devotion and solicitude, which they could imagine; in vain even did the monthly remittance from the faithful Bolea, which had never once failed from the first, convey to him all that could most administer to his comforts or consolation: the cold steel had now pierced his very soul.

Again ten whole months elapsed, during which our hapless hero was not observed once to smile, and all expectation of any change in his fortunes had definitively fled, when, late one evening, he was startled, in his lonely cell, by a most unexpected visit from the Governor. The old soldier seemed greatly perplexed and agitated, and, after some attempt at circumlocution, informed his prisoner that a judicial commission had just arrived at the fortress,

with full powers from the King to renew the interrogatory which had been suspended formerly, in consequence of his exhausted state, and also for other purposes.

Villaflor was in that frame of mind which renders any adventure welcome, however perilous may be its consequences, and he expressed himself fully ready to attend where his presence was required. He was thereupon conducted at once to the principal hall of the fortress, where, by the indistinct glimmering of two torches, he beheld several persons, among whom he could only recognise the sinister features of Morales, eagerly conversing together. When Moriz was introduced, they each assumed their respective seats, and the foremost personage, acting as judge, summoned him to approach.

"Moriz de Villaflor," said he, in a stern and peremptory voice, "I have to direct that you will attentively listen to the document which the Señor Morales is about to read to you. Proceed at once, Morales."

This paper was no other than a formal sentence, distinctly setting forth the various

crimes and treasons of which Moriz de Villafior had been accused and convicted, and awarding to him the penalty of death upon the scaffold.

"You have duly understood what you have heard, Moriz de Villafior?" then resumed the judge.

"I have," replied he, with what calmness he could best affect, "and, Heaven be praised, I am not unprepared for the awful intelligence."

"The sentence is to be executed without much longer delay."

Moriz inclined his head in token of his respectful resignation.

"The sentence, I say, is to be executed forthwith, except you can show some sufficient reason both for your murderous attack upon Luigi Davila, and your presence at Barcelona on the 24th of September, 1591;—or unless you can impart such intelligence thereupon as may assist his majesty's government in bringing to justice those of the rebels who have as yet escaped. In either of these cases, I have some

hopes to hold out to you of His Majesty's clemency."

"Señor Juez," answered Villafior, "I can affirm to you, upon the word of a Caballero, that I have no intelligence to reveal respecting the late insurrection which could in any way be profitable to his Majesty or to his government. As to the motives of my appearance at Barcelona, they were, I can state upon my honour, wholly private, personal, and unconnected with any political object; and yet, so help me God and our Lady, I will never divulge them to mortal man."

"Then you refuse his Majesty's clemency, as I have been instructed to extend it to you?"

"I have nothing to add, Señor Juez, to the reply which I have already submitted to your excellency."

We will not undertake to affirm that, as he bid this last farewell to life, our hero's voice and manner retained all their wonted firmness; and yet, upon the whole, the fatal words were so uttered as not to unbeseem his former honourable reputation.

The judge slowly rose from his seat, and

withdrew to the background, there to hold some short conference with two personages, of very unequal stature, who had remained behind enveloped in their riding cloaks, and still more effectually shrouded by the darkness which hung about the furthestmost recesses of the antiquated apartment.

“Señor de Villafior,” resumed he, as he returned towards the table where Morales was writing, by the light of the torches, “it is my painful duty to inform you that if you are unwilling still to answer the questions which I have just recapitulated, you must again be put to the torture, previously to your final execution.”

Having received no further reply, the judge rang a small bell which was lying upon the table, whereupon Moriz beheld his old acquaintance Diego Ruiz entering, at the further end of the hall, with his attendants, and all the fearful apparatus of the cordel. In a few seconds, the hands of the unresisting victim were firmly secured, and the questions having been solemnly repeated, the first turn was given to the rope.

Moriz merely uttered one deep groan; but,

from the other extremity of the hall, a loud and thrilling shriek of anguish was heard, and the slighter form of one of the strangers was seen falling powerless to the ground.

"The youth is unaccustomed to such sights," observed the impassible Morales. But the accident was doubtless more serious than he deemed; for, upon a sign from the judge, the prisoner was first released from the hands of the executioner, and then re-conducted to his lonely cell.

During the long sleepless night which ensued, Villafior endeavoured to prepare himself, as beseemed a devout son of the church, for the dread doom which was awaiting him; but when, on the following morning, the door of his prison chamber was suddenly cast open, he beheld, not the sallow features of the expected ghostly confessor, but the honest visage of Bolea, beaming with every expression of the most joyous exultation.

"I have no leisure for explanation now," exclaimed the escribiente, after the first hearty embrace. "All that I can say, is, that you are free—that you must accompany

me at once to Madrid, and that you may thank Heaven, on the way, for having granted you the most intelligent and efficient friend who ever redeemed the follies of a well-nigh insane college-companion."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHEN, with such care and precautions as were still required by his enfeebled condition, Moriz and his invaluable friend reached the fair city of Madrid, the former had not succeeded in eliciting from his fellow-traveller any distinct or intelligible account of the circumstances which had led to this most sudden and hopeful revolution in his fortunes. All that he could gather was, that he was principally indebted for his release to the interest and intercession of the Duque d'Uzeda, and that their foremost duty would be to wait on that grandee, and lay at his feet the tribute of their most respectful gratitude. In

accordance with this advice, earnestly and frequently reiterated, the Señor de Villafior accompanied his friend to the residence of that illustrious personage, on the very day after their return to the capital.

They found him engaged in close conversation with several persons, apparently of foreign extraction; but no sooner did he behold Bolea, than he moved forward to meet him, and addressed him with extreme kindness. The welcome which our hero received was not less flattering: and though the Duque d'Uzeda was decidedly inferior to the ill-fated Villahermosa in exterior advantages, yet there was something in his tone and manner which forcibly reminded Moriz of his earlier patron. He did not fail to offer, in the best terms he could command, his deep acknowledgment to his new protector, for all the exertions vouchsafed in his behalf; but the Duke soon interrupted him, exclaiming:—

“Name it not, Señor de Villafior—name it not. You have been a little imprudent, and still more unfortunate; but I trust that now the worst is over. Have you seen my niece?”

"Your niece, Señor Duque," muttered Villafior, in deep amazement; "the Señora Doña Elvira? Is she at Madrid?"

"Yes, she has been staying here with me for some little time; but, to-morrow, we go to Almonacid. You have not seen her?"

"No, Señor Duque."

"Then wait here for a few minutes, if you are at leisure; for she is shortly coming, I believe, to welcome these gentlemen from Vienna, whom I have long known."

Scarcely were these words uttered, when the folding-doors at the farther extremity of the apartment were thrown open, and the fair Condesa herself entered. As the glance which she cast around her fell upon Villafior, she started slightly, and, for a moment, the colour fled from her blooming cheek; she soon recovered herself, however, as she most graciously accosted the illustrious strangers, whom her uncle hastened to present to her. What the subject of their discourse was, our hero certainly did not gather, for he could hear nothing save the wild throbbings of his own heart; but when the averted eye of Doña

Elvira allowed him to rest upon her, he observed that she wore an apparel so gloomy that it seemed a suit of mourning, and that an expression of calm and settled melancholy imparted a new character to her undiminished beauty.

At length, each of the foreign visitors whom she had been instructed to greet, had in turn drawn back, and she approached the spot where the Señor Moriz was standing.

"I suppose, Elvira, that I need not present this cavalier to you?" said the Duque d'Uzeda.

"No," replied the Condesa, with a slight smile, and then fixing her bright eyes, for one anxious moment, full upon the face of our hero, she resumed, in a low and tremulous voice:—

"Señor de Villafior, I am truly happy to see you again restored to health and to freedom."

Was it embarrassment?—was it the vindictive memory of the past?—or was it some unavowed feeling of interest and of compassion that thus moved the haughty beauty as

she addressed him? At all events, this welcome, so different from the last dread communication which he had received from her, flew to the soul of our hero, and utterly unmanned him. Observing his deep and almost breathless agitation, Bolea, who was standing close at hand, stepped a little forward, and, with a deep obeisance, explained to Doña Elvira the object of their visit.

"Oh!" answered she, "my uncle must have assured you that he had the greatest pleasure in seconding your unsparing exertions in favour of your friend."

"He has, in truth, Señora Condesa; but we are almost as much indebted to you."

"I should be happy to think that I had also been of some service," replied she, "for you are my witness that I have endeavoured to forget all connected with the past, saving what I could remember with gratitude."

With these words, and a graceful inclination of the head, the fair Condesa took leave, first of our friends, then of the remainder of the company, and slowly retired through the folding-doors which had given her admission. They closed upon her, and she was gone.

The sun, the glowing sun of Castile, was then shining brightly, and no cloud was seen to obscure its radiance as it streamed, in joyous floods, through the windows of the noble apartment. Why did the chill darkness of the approaching storm creep over the senses of Villafior, and for a moment enshroud all things around him in its sable folds?

He was recalled from this transient fit of abstraction by the voice of Bolea whispering in his ear:

“Moriz, I think that we should retire now.”

They again approached the Grandee together, reiterated their grateful thanks, and took their respectful farewell.

Moriz almost mechanically followed his companion as they regained together the vestibule of the Palacio; but just as they were issuing from the inner portal, an attendant drew near them, and said: “That the Condesa de Sierra Dorado desired to see the Señor de Villafior for a few minutes, in her own apartment.”

“Ah! caramba, Moriz,” whispered his smiling friend, “you are a lucky man; but, for Heaven’s sake, try and recover a little assur-

ance and a little colour, so as not to unbecome overmuch such favours of fortune."

When introduced into the room where Doña Elvira was sitting alone, our hero recognised several minor articles of furniture which she was wont to have around her at Barcelona, each of which had been well-treasured in his own memory; and indeed the whole scene and circumstance savoured so strongly of some fitful creation of his over-excited brain, that he paused and looked anxiously around him more than once, as if to ascertain whether it were in truth no deceitful vision. The voice of the fair apparition herself soon, however, dispelled any such doubts.

"Señor de Villafior," said she, "as I must leave Madrid to-morrow, I was desirous of seeing you thus for a moment in private."

Moriz replied by a silent obeisance.

"Much that has occurred since we parted is attributable, as you well know, to your own imprudence and contempt of my earnest advice and warning. Still, I should be loath that you should think me utterly unmindful that, for me, you have made many sacrifices, and

have incurred much peril and suffering, although assuredly not in the spirit that I had required and that you had promised. I should be unwilling also—most unwilling—that you should suppose me to be wholly indifferent to your future prospects and welfare, which, I much fear, are not now very promising. May I ask what are your intentions and plans?”

“Indeed, madam,” answered our hero, partially restored to his self-possession by the homelier turn which the conversation was assuming, “indeed, I have had hardly leisure to reflect upon any earthly care since I have been so unexpectedly recalled to the necessity of providing for the morrow.”

“I have thought much upon the matter,” continued the Condesa, “and canvassed it with your friend Bolea. You are aware, I suppose, that your whole patrimony has been confiscated?”

“I had expected as much, madam, though I had not yet received the positive assurance.”

“I fear,” resumed Doña Elvira, “that, upon that point, the decision of the crown is irrevocable. As to any species of political prefer-

ment, I suppose that I need not remind you that you can have nothing whatever now to expect ; and, if I have been truly informed, your right arm is still so powerless that you are disabled from all active military service."

Though this singular recapitulation was uttered in a tone of interest almost amounting to tenderness, it could not convey any very cheerful impression to poor Moriz's mind, and it is not surprising that he should have responded merely by a deep groan.

"This being the indisputable case," proceeded the Condesa, "I have conceived, in accordance with the Señor Bolea, that the only fitting resource left open for you would be — a connexion——" here the fair speaker's voice not unnaturally faltered a little—"a connexion by marriage with one, who, while not unequal to yourself in birth and station, would be endowed with worldly advantages fully sufficient for the comfort of both. Such a person, Señor de Villafior, I think that I could point out: what say you to the arrangement?"

Moriz would gladly have inquired what prospect of happiness would be held out by an

union to which, on one side at least, the heart must remain so utter a stranger; but fearful that this observation might be misconstrued into some allusion to the fair Condesa's own position, he more prudently remained silent.

"I see by your looks," said she, after a moment's pause, "that my proposition meets with but little grace in your sight. You are wrong, Señor de Villafior. The person to whom I allude is esteemed as fair and as virtuous as she is high-born and wealthy: many there are in Spain, far more exalted in degree than yourself, who would not disdain her hand."

"Disdain, fair madam! Can you seriously impute such a feeling to one so entirely fallen and wretched as myself? But others can sincerely promise that which I, alas, may offer never more."

"If you mean by that, the true devotion of an honest husband's heart," replied the Condesa, "I am quite at a loss to see why you could not proffer it to one such as I have described."

Villafior shook his head, mournfully, but answered nothing.

Doña Elvira gazed earnestly at the silent youth, with something of returning sternness, and resumed:—

“Am I to believe, Señor, that that wild and not guiltless insanity, which has already been the cause of so much misery to yourself, and to others, and which has been visited with such severe, and not unbecoming punishment, is not yet completely overcome? Say, at once, for I have no time for dallying here: is some such motive implied in your apparent refusal of what I have proposed?”

“Oh, no! in truth, noble lady,” cried Villafior, falling at her feet. “For pity’s sake, let me not think that I have been so utterly miserable as again to incur your displeasure. Saving in one fatal hour of forgetfulness, I have always known, I have always felt, that as well might I offer my senseless homage to one of the remotest stars in the blessed firmament above our heads, as to you. But now, there was no more resentment in your smile. Oh! believe me, I have not deserved to see you again frown upon me thus.”

“I am happy to hear it, and willing to

credit it," replied the somewhat pacified Condesa; "but then I must suppose, that some other, and more befitting devotion has deprived your heart of its freedom."

"Oh, think not that, noble lady!" cried Villafior, in breathless eagerness; "for that were falser than the Spirit of Evil itself."

"Well, then," resumed the Condesa, "as you so anxiously disclaim either of my conjectures, perhaps you will favour me so far as to explain what this may be?" and as she thus spoke, she drew from her bosom a silken knot, which the luckless Moriz could well recognise. "I have been credibly informed," continued she, "that a youth, supposed to be possessed of the ordinary faculties attributed to mankind, has been seen and heard addressing this little tie, of now somewhat faded silk, with the wildest expressions of rapture, and of affection; and this, not in one passing mood, but for many successive hours, day after day, and month after month. Señor de Villafior, can this be true?"

"Perchance, fair lady, that ill-starred youth had received injunctions from his friends to

simulate the insanity to which misfortune had well-nigh driven him."

Such was the best excuse, or defence, which our startled hero could devise; but it did not satisfy the inexorable Elvira.

"A certain amount of such compliance might be conceived," replied she; "but, still, it is awful to think that one, whose foot was on the grave, one for whom the scaffold was already erected, should have found no more fitting object of worship than this bauble, defying the Holy Church, and insulting every Saint in heaven by his senseless idolatry. It is true," added she, with a slightly sarcastic smile, "that, when the last moment did seem to approach, the vaunted treasure was so completely forgotten, that it was not even missed when it had been withdrawn."

"Oh, speak not thus, madam!" exclaimed Villafior. "It is true, that, on that last night, when Diego Ruiz and his ruthless associates dragged me once more to the torture, that sole and priceless token of the past was torn from me, with the vestment which ever confined it upon my heart. Bolea, how-

ever, will tell you, and not he alone, with what frantic despair I claimed it of all around me; first, when I thought it was to accompany me to the scaffold, and then when it was to be the still cherished associate of my freedom. For the sake of our blessed Lady, madam, do but ask Bolea, if he succeeded in withdrawing me from the tower of Segovia, until all my entreaties and all my offers for the recovery of what you now hold, had completely failed."

This assurance was perfectly true, though, to avoid troubling you with any useless iterations, we had forborne, gentle reader, to allude to it in a former place.

"I shall certainly not address any such insensate question to him, or to any other," replied the Condesa. "And, indeed, I feel much inclined at once to destroy this record of human weakness, and of human folly."

As she thus spoke, Doña Elvira raised the gilded scissors which hung from her girdle by a massive chain of gold, and deliberately proceeded to cut up into small shreds the ill-fated love-knot.

It is surprising that, such being her frame

of mind, she should have suffered the Señor Moriz to remain still kneeling at her feet from the moment when, thus and there, he had so earnestly repudiated any peculiar feeling of devotion to her. We must suppose that she was too much accustomed to such homage to attach any peculiar meaning to it, or perhaps, to observe it in this case. However that may be, such was still our hero's position when he beheld, with what agony of spirit we will not attempt to describe, the pitiless execution to which we have just alluded. What was he to say, how was he to interfere to save the luckless token, which was immolated on account of the very feelings which it had inspired? At length, in the last paroxysm of his despair, he exclaimed:—

“Oh! spare it, noble lady!—spare it, at least, as the chivalrous badge of an illustrious house!”

Nothing could be more unfortunate than this remark, though it caused the implacable Elvira to pause for a moment, for she soon replied:

“The colours of a noble house—these? Let me see whose they may be. They are not the

Medina Sidonias', nor the d'Ossuñas'. Azure, argent, gules, and or. I know of no house in Spain, saving one, who can lay claim to this badge. What can this mean?" added she, now fixing her eyes full upon her prostrate lover. "I trust that I may be mistaken, but there is new evidence here of what I most dreaded: this calls for some notice, indeed, upon my part. Señor de Villafior, when we this morning met, I was fully disposed, as you must have seen, to forget, and to forgive all the past; but this incorrigible presumption upon your part makes it incumbent on me to declare, that henceforth we must be strangers to each other. Farewell: I would willingly have taken leave of you on other terms, and in another spirit; but you have yourself driven me to this."

With these words she moved hastily to the door, which she reached ere the astounded Moriz could devise any means of detaining her, or of disarming her displeasure. When he beheld her no more, his head fell upon the couch before him, and, exhausted as he was by all that he had so lately undergone, he burst into an agony of grief.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

How long the unfortunate Villafior remained in the condition which we have just described, he would doubtless himself have been at a loss to state; but when he was aroused at length by the pressure of a friendly hand upon his shoulder, he beheld the Duque d'Uzeda, who, all unperceived, had entered the apartment, and moved up to his side.

"What is this, amigo?" exclaimed the good-natured grandee. "Are you unwell, or can it be that my niece has said or done something thus to wound you?"

"Alas, Señor Duque, I alone am to blame!" replied our hero, not a little embarrassed at being discovered in such a situation.

“You to blame, Señor Moriz! You surely cannot have refused to comply with the wishes which Elvira was to express to you this morning on the part of us all?”

Villafior remained silent, for what had he to reply?

“Can it be,” resumed d’Uzeda, “that you entertain any prejudice against the lady to whom she alluded?”

“That could hardly be, Señor Duque,” observed Moriz, “for no name was mentioned by Doña Elvira to me ——”

“No name mentioned, amigo,—that will never do! Surely you cannot refuse a fair lady’s hand, without knowing her name. Pray return at once to Elvira, whom you will find in her room close by, and request her to give you some further detail.”

“Indeed, Señor Duque, I dare not, after what has occurred.”

“You dare not, amigo; I say you must and shall. Come, let me conduct you to the door, and you can tell Elvira that you have my positive commands for making this further inquiry.”

When thus urged, Villafior entered the adjoining room, he found the Condesa seated there, apparently in an attitude of deep reflection. She seemed startled at his sudden appearance, but she coloured more deeply still when informed by him, in a faltering voice, of the object of his intrusion.

“I think that my uncle might have given you the information as well as me,” observed she, at length; “but since he so wills it, I will endeavour myself to enlighten you—that is to say, if you will condescend yourself to listen to me. Remember, however, that I am not justified in mentioning the name of this unfortunate lady merely that she should be exposed to such an unwarrantable affront as the refusal of her hand. Do you feel that you could relent a little, if I told you that you have often seen and admired her?”

Villafior gazed upon the gentle speaker so intently as to oblige her to withdraw from him her own beaming eyes, and then muttered the name of the fascinating Sirena in a tone more desponding than ever.

“Alas! no, Señor,” replied his smiling tor-

mentor, "I lament to say that it cannot now be her. To be sure, she did weep intensely the day that you finally left Barcelona, and refused every consolation which we could offer. But she has since espoused a gallant Catalonian cavalier, with whom she lives, I believe, in perfect happiness, though I have not seen her myself since the Conde's death."

"The Conde's death!" exclaimed Villafior, starting back, as if the lurid light of madness had suddenly broken upon his bewildered mind. "Is the Conde de Sierra Dorada no more?"

"I am surprised that you should not have heard it before. It is now nearly ten months since he expired, surrounded by every care which affection and solicitude could bestow. But to return to this poor rejected lady, she is one to whom you have addressed such language as, if I am to credit you, the fair Sirena herself could never have inspired. Long she had thought that the pure light of true and chivalrous devotion lay all extinguished and buried in one bloody grave, and she was fully resigned never again to exchange, with any

mortal man, the blessed pledge of mutual and heaven-appointed love. But you appeared, Moriz de Villafior; when her wayward and ungovernable spirit seemed most to persecute, you had no thought but to serve and save her; for her you sacrificed, without a sigh, all your bright visions of manly ambition and preferment; you accepted—nay, you courted—the awful doom of the dishonoured traitor, lest one breath of censure or of reproach should, peradventure, reach her reputation. The tale was so strange that none would believe it. They who reported it were derided as crazed readers of fables and of romaunts, until ocular demonstration was afforded to the most incredulous,—until their fingers rested upon the very wounds. And she, for whom all this was endured, Moriz—was her name Sirena?"

Where was he to whom this question was addressed? Again at her feet, and his head rested upon her knees; but so buried was it now in the folds of her garments that scarcely could she hear his voice, as he replied,—

"Have mercy, gentle lady; oh, have mercy!

lately I have endured all that

has been most cunningly devised to break down human fortitude, and, worse than all, the terrors of your displeasure. Think how I have loved you against all hope—when every human suffering was my penalty; and reflect upon what the overtried soul would endure if what I have just heard from your lips was ever addressed to me.”

“I must proceed, Moriz—I must proceed—as I am bounden to vindicate also one whose conduct must have appeared strange indeed to many. At first, when he who had stolen—nay, had conquered her heart, whispered in her ear the long-forgotten language of tenderness, such were her duties, such was her position, that there was guilt and peril for her in every unrepressed word to which she might merely listen; and when, at length, through his reckless imprudence, something of the fatal secret was surmised by her ever-jealous lord, she had no alternative left than to save both from utter ruin by disclaiming the rash suitor.”

“But, gentle lady,” muttered Villafior, “was it absolutely necessary for her so rudely to reject him, and even to bear herself the ill-omened tale to her husband?”

“What mean you?” resumed Doña Elvira, in great astonishment; “surely you must have seen that when I broke from you with such extreme and studied indignation in the garden of the Palacio, I had just perceived the eyes of the Conde’s own slave Mohammed intently fixed upon our proceedings through the foliage of the arbour, behind which he had screened himself. Well could I divine that he would bear, with true Oriental horror, to his master, his own interpretation of what he had witnessed; and I judged rightly, I think, when I followed close upon him to relate the most plausible and the least perilous version that, in the terror of the moment, I could devise.”

“This is a new light to me, indeed, noble lady; but yet it sheds not its blessed lustre upon that awful communication which you sent me through Anita Serral.”

“I a communication to you?” replied the Condesa. “Can it so be that that village girl who accosted me on the very eve of the Conde’s death had really seen you, and was to return to you? Gracious heaven! I thought and foul stratagem of that

traitor Maldonado, and I, in consequence, delivered to her that answer which it best suited our purpose that he should receive. Nay," continued she, now abandoning her all-unresisting hand to the ardent embraces of Villafior, "she for whom so much was endured, suffered scarcely less herself, while, watched at each hour of the day and night by the lynx-eyed glance of twofold jealousy, she had alternately to compute the dangers which her inaction or her interference might create. That she was not indifferent, Heaven could testify; that she has not been utterly powerless to save, what has since occurred may show; but all would have been ruined by one incautious word, or message, or look from her. At length, at its appointed hour, the fatal stroke of death restored her to her independence; but even then, anxious to show to the dead that respect and faith which she had kept and ever would have kept to the living, she long forbore to appear. Now she is free; now she has entirely fulfilled every obligation which the holy church could claim, or the world could impose; now she has wealth and


titles and honours to bestow, and not less precious than these, the life-long devotion of a woman's heart. All lie there, Moriz de Villafior, in that feeble hand which you so firmly enclose in your own; say, will you accept it, once and for ever, or am I in turn to learn that cruel lesson which, until this hour, I have been constrained to teach. Answer me, dear and dearest Moriz—one word, that I may be yours as you are mine."

But this tender appeal was all unheeded by him to whom it was addressed. The frail mind of man can no more endure the extremity of joy than that of suffering, and the youthful form which the terrified Elvira now beheld at her feet was as unconscious as it had been when it was at first released from the ghastly embrace of the cordel. The swoon, however, was not of such long duration; and the passages which ensued between these two young lovers whom fortune had so cruelly persecuted, and so deeply blessed, were such as fully to compensate either, as you will doubtless think, gentle reader, for all that they had undergone.

## CHAPTER XXX.

WITH the discretion which we shall ourselves observe, the Duque d'Uzeda forbore to intrude upon the blissful couple until they had had fully time to exchange, for the past as well as for the future, every impassioned expression of tenderness and of endearment which the ardour of their exalted souls could supply; and when he did appear it was to welcome Villafior to his embrace as his nephew and the companion of his life. Though the fortune which the Condesa de Sierra Dorada had inherited from her husband, and the titles which accompanied it, were greater and loftier than, in his most aspiring hour, our hero had

ever ventured so much as to desire for himself, the Duque had already taken measures to increase them by such free donations of his own as he could make in justice to his other heirs. He also informed the happy bridegroom that he had his Majesty's orders for introducing him, on some early occasion, to the royal presence, where Moriz would receive the most flattering assurances of forgiveness for the past and of favour for the future.

In the course of the conversation which ensued, our hero ascertained many particulars respecting the circumstances which had led to his release, and he did not fail entirely to satisfy, on this point, the not unnatural curiosity which the discreet Bolea had refused to allay. At first, as it appeared, the Duque d'Uzeda, though not unmindful of the important service which he had received from the elder Villafior, had been somewhat loath to take so anxious a part in favour of Moriz as the ardent Francisco had suggested. In due time, however, a letter, which his niece,  once evading the ever-vigilant scrutiny of

Maldonado, succeeded in forwarding to him, warned him that no exertion for the rescue of the victim would be greater than was required by the honour of the family. Thereupon, and using his full influence, first with the redoubted Vasquez de Arce, then with the King himself, he obtained the reprieve of the prisoner, and his transfer to Segovia. Upon a later occasion, having gone to Barcelona to see his niece, at her most earnest request, he had received from her a full account and confession of what had occurred, and had thenceforth taken such steps as fully to ensure Villafior from any further peril. Still, the King's anger against all to whom any share was attributed in the late insurrection remained unappeased, and so long as the Conde de Sierra Dorado's precarious existence was prolonged, the evil genius and unfathomable malignity of Maldonado were to be feared. It was therefore decided by Moriz's friends that the safer course would be to leave him in the secure shelter of the tower of Segovia, until he could be restored to freedom without any danger or risk. After the death of the

Conde de Sierra Dorado, these precautions were no longer requisite. In concert with his niece, and the President Rodrigo Vasquez, the Duque d'Uzeda ordered the seizure of all Maldonado's secret papers deposited with his sister at the Castanar; and then having summoned him to his presence, astounded him with a calm, but complete recital of all his past or intended treacheries. Well-seeing that his baneful influence was at an end, and that the enemies which he had provoked were far more powerful than the friends whom he might yet retain, Don Diego saw no alternative but to throw himself upon the mercy of the Duke, who finally consented, at the request of Doña Elvira, to forget the past, on condition that the discarded secretary should for ever retire from Spain. This engagement having been taken, a subordinate but lucrative situation was procured for him in the province of Mexico, to which destination he was forthwith despatched.

"This intricate personage having been thus disposed of," resumed the Duke, "nothing remained for your friend, Bolea, and me, but to

obtain, for your liberation, the sanction of the King; who, insomuch as he might still remember your case, was under the impression that the proceedings were merely suspended in consequence of the state of your health. I was endeavouring, to the best of my experience in such matters, to prepare the Royal mind, through sundry channels, for the request which I had to urge; but it would appear that I did not act with sufficient alacrity for everybody's taste, as, to my utter surprise, I was one day informed that I had been forestalled, without my knowledge or assent, by a certain noble dame ——”

“ Oh! tio querido,” interposed the blushing Elvira, “ I think that you might spare this detail.”

“ Not at all,” continued the Duke. “ You really must be broken now, Elvira, of your habit of keeping secrets from your husband. Well, nothing would serve this lady, whom you here behold, but to see the King herself, and to impart to him all, or well nigh all. Would you believe me, it was from no less a personage than his Majesty himself that I first

learned the real nature and extent of the interest which you had inspired in your fate? With the spirit of his younger days, our sagacious Sovereign had discerned, in an hour, more than I had discovered in a year; and it was he himself who first conveyed to me the notion of our future alliance. I will own, Moriz, that I was a little startled at first, though the deep debt which I owe to your poor father, and your own honourable name and services, militated strongly in favour of our connexion. What doubts and misgivings I might have had respecting the expediency of your union with Elvira, I freely stated to her; she no less freely combated them; and, indeed, so vehement was her description of your chivalrous devotion to her cause, that I could scarcely give full credence to her enthusiastic tale. Hence we were gradually led to discuss the plan of submitting you to some fresh ordeal, which would distinctly put to the test that constancy and self-sacrifice on your part, for which no human reward will be too great, and which you finally evinced in our presence."

"In your presence, Señor Duque?" exclaimed the astonished Villafior.

"Yes, amigo; and you may now guess, if you have not divined it before, who two, at least, of those strangers were who so cautiously remained in the obscure background, on that last night at Segovia, and one of whom fell senseless to the floor upon hearing the first sign of pain which escaped from you."

"So that I am indebted to the Señora, especially," said Moriz, "for this third application of the torture, combined with the charming prospect, during a whole night, of immediate death upon the scaffold!"

"Remember that she thereby gave the most striking proof of her confidence in your generous devotion and manly courage," whispered the Condesa, as she rested her lovely head upon the shoulder of her accepted spouse.

"A compliment, Moriz, which I feel assured that you will find some means of rexuiting," remarked the Duke, "when you become her lord and master evermore."

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Our tale is concluded, gentle reader, much to your satisfaction, we have no doubt, in more senses than one; but as the interest you have surely taken in some of our foremost personages may require some slight insight into their future destiny, we will subjoin, for your peculiar satisfaction, the following very laconic particulars:

The Señor Antonio Perez, of whom we have seen so little, but heard so much, succeeded in escaping to France first, and subsequently to England. In both these countries, he found a secure refuge from the implacable animosity of his sovereign, whose designs he was, on more than one occasion, enabled to counteract by the connexions which he successively formed with the leading statesmen of the Courts of Henry IV. and of Queen Elizabeth. In the momentous struggle to which his flight into Aragon had given rise, the time-honoured privileges of that province perished for ever; and even when the destinies of the Spanish monarchy were wielded by another sovereign and other counsellors, he never obtained permission to return to the land of his birth. As to the in-

trepid Gil de Mesa, he continued to share, in exile, the fortunes of his fallen patron, and received with him, in France, many flattering marks of distinction from a monarch than whom none was more worthy to appreciate or to reward chivalrous constancy and fortitude.

We have seen that, at the moment of his arrest at Barcelona, our hero had urged upon his faithful page to provide at once for his own safety. Very unwillingly complying with this injunction, Guzman had retired on board a vessel, which was shortly to sail for Valencia, from which town he subsequently proceeded to Madrid, disguised as carefully as his means could afford. He there placed himself at the disposal of the Señor de Bolea, and was, in due course of time, restored to his former master's service, where he gradually rose to somewhat high and consequential office.

Diego de Maldonado was not long at Mexico without succeeding in attaining there a considerable degree of local importance and eminence, and could thus have consoled himself for many bitter disappointments by the re-

flection attributed to the greatest Cæsar, that it is better to be first in a hovel than second in Rome. But his restless and ill-regulated spirit continued to prey upon itself, and his early death was attributed to the fevered workings of his defeated ambition, more than to the agency of any physical disease.

In a widely different temper, the honest Francisco de Bolea continued to discharge the duties of his office without any other care than that of enjoying to his utmost the blessings which it might please Providence to throw in his way. So soon as the Señor Asumar retired, the Secretary Moura was easily persuaded to replace that functionary by the expert and trustworthy Bolea; and when, at the accession of Philip III., Don Christobal was constrained to resign the golden key of his office to Don Francisco Gomez de Sandoval, better known in history under his subsequent title of Duque de Lerma, that eminent statesman neglected no opportunity of testifying his entire confidence in the experienced under-secretary, whom he found so firmly installed in his

Between the excellent Bolea, and that friend whose life and fortunes he had so ably saved and redeemed, the most intimate affection continued ever to subsist. During the year which followed his splendid espousals with the Condesa de Sierra Dorado, Villafior remained with her and the Duque d'Uzeda at the noble residence of Almonacid, in the enjoyment of every description of domestic bliss. They then returned to the Court, in consequence of a summons from the Secretary Moura, and our hero received the first of the many civil, military, and diplomatic missions which were subsequently to illustrate his brilliant career, and which, in conjunction with the more important blessings conferred by his hopeful union with the fair Doña Elvira, never allowed him furthermore to regret that he had chosen

THE LOFTIER RANGE.

END OF VILLAFIOR.





FERNANDA.

---

Una notte e mai fosse l'alba !—PETRARCHA.



# FERNANDA.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE cloudless full moon of the south was shedding its gentle lustre upon the bay and coast of Palermo, but its silvery beams were not required to illumine, on that night, the gardens of the vice-regal residence. Not only did the noble villa itself show like an enchanted palace of fire, amid the myrtle and orange groves in which it was embedded; but every tree around it bore many a radiant blossom of streaming light. And if, in some of the furthestmost, or more thickly wooded recesses, the calm repose of the night shade

was still unstartled by these emblems of revelry, though no youthful dame could venture to stray there alone, yet we have not heard that they remained entirely untenanted and deserted.

"Well, my dear Inez," said the Duque de San Lucar, to the respected partner of his exalted fortunes, as they issued forth together to breathe the fresh air without, "you must be well pleased with the progress of your festa. I have never seen the dancing in the marble hall kept up with greater spirit."

"So I was just thinking," replied Doña Inez, "and were it not for those two dice-tables, which I have in vain attempted to break up, I should be perfectly satisfied. But where is Doña Fernanda? Have you seen her lately?"

"Not for more than an hour, and then she was descending these steps in company with Montalto."

"That is precisely what you wish, is it not?"

"Certainly—could I but think, that this mutual inclination, which is evidently spring-

ing up between them, would lead to its natural consummation, I should rejoice more than I can say. Montalto is by birth, fortune, and personal merit, one of the first, if not the first, among the nobles of Sicily. His marriage with the widow of our predecessor, upon whose Spanish heart I know that I can depend, would tend, more than many a skilful political combination, to cement the much-desired union between us and these intractable Islanders."

"Besides this excellent motive, which I fully appreciate," rejoined the Duquesa, "I own, that I very much wish to see Fernanda select one among the many admirers that are constantly following in her train. It really is a perilous experiment, for one thus singularly beautiful, to prolong so youthful a widowhood in the dissipated society which she frequents."

"I quite agree with you; but do you think that we shall ever overcome her unaccountable aversion to a second marriage?"

"It will not be an easy matter: her short-lived union with Don Guzman was so unfeli-

citous! But here she comes, accompanied still by Montalto alone, and issuing from the longest and darkest alley of the outer garden. Let us retire, lest we should interrupt their conversation. Certainly they are a lovely couple."

And a lovely couple indeed they were who now emerged into the bright regions which expanded before the marble terraces of the villa,—two youthful beings that none could behold without a prayer, that no evil might ever beset the path that they would tread together, were it to lead from the festive hall even to the church, and from the church to the grave.

"Now, my dear sir," said Fernanda, as they approached the outer terrace, "allow me to say, that if you are not tired to death with wandering in those dusky mazes through which you have been conducting me for the last hour, I am. In truth, I am no owl to revel in darkness, and your choicest palfrey would hardly bear to be thus paced up and down for so long a time."

"Nay, but lovely Fernanda, do grant me

one more turn, ere we again mingle in that noisy and heartless crowd. I have scarcely yet told you my reasons for not reckoning the Principessa di Colonna the most fascinating lady at present among us."

"Oh, I can spare you that trouble. Because you prefer fair hair to dark, and blue eyes to black, and a slight figure to a more commanding stature. But, as it is of course to be my poor portrait which you are now to delineate as your real standard of beauty, you will have better opportunity for retracing it correctly by the light of these torches than in yonder obscure groves."

"You jest, Doña Fernanda, as usual. Alas, you can ill comprehend or requite the feelings that you inspire!"

"Well, but what would you have me say in exchange for these compliments, most flattering no doubt, but not equally original. Must I tell you, that no woman can be pardoned for approving of the appearance of any man who has not long dark locks, eyes darker still, and a voice as solemn as the bells of Santa Rosalia on Easter Eve? I can deal

in compliments as well as you, Signor, for I well know what they mean and what they are worth; in other words, I despise them so thoroughly, as never to deny them to any one."

"Fernanda," replied Montalto, after a moment's pause, "if for once you will grant the ardent prayer of my soul, you will allow me, at the approaching tournament, to wear that light scarf, which you value no more than I do these silken gloves, useless even for the chase. You would then see if your unworthy champion is speaking in earnest, when he tells you of the love which has now absorbed his whole existence."

"I feel very sure," answered the still smiling Fernanda, "that you will again distinguish yourself by your prowess, but who is to tell me, whether you will be fighting so valiantly for the poor smile of your mistress, or for your own far brighter reputation?"

"That doubt, you can easily solve," replied the impassioned youth. "Should you really wish to ascertain which of these priceless objects I would sacrifice for the other, do but

command me to yield the palm of victory to whomsoever you may appoint. You shall see my lance fall before the humblest that Sicily or Spain may send into the lists, and a discomfited knight shall claim at your feet the reward that you would withhold from manly courage, to bestow it upon the most servile obedience."

"Indeed!"

"Ay, indeed! Yet this would scarcely be a fitting test: the secret, irrepressible hope of some guerdon too precious, too unimaginable to be distinctly thought of, might still uphold me in the bitterness of that hour. My love, Fernanda, is not so presumptuous: it requires but one poor recompence—that you would believe in it. Oh, that you would but say, by what death I could deserve one smile from you—one smile not of irony, but of sympathy, or even of pity, and I would as blithely lay down my life as ever weary warrior has thrown off his armour on the battle-field of a long summer's day. Ah, I have moved you now, Fernanda, and for once there was no sarcasm in that look!"

“Well, but if the light of these torches is so bright that they show you all that I may feel and more still, I shall be constrained to return with you to the alley which we have just forsaken. Listen to me, Montalto,” continued Doña Fernando, in a more serious tone, and fixing her dark and piercing blue eyes full upon her youthful lover, “yours is a noble and generous heart, one with which it would be criminal indeed for a woman to trifle. To what does this impassioned discourse and all your late conduct tend?”

“Merely to ascertain how, at the price of my life, I can convince you of my love.”

“Nay, Montalto, but I am no murderess, except in the most figurative and poetical sense—I wish you to keep your life as much for my sake as for your own, and I must therefore, if you are really in earnest, allow of no deception, whether voluntary or involuntary, on my part. Understand that I have no wish and no intention of parting with the liberty that I have so lately recovered, and of which, by the bitterest experience, I have learnt the priceless value. If, with this persuasion, you

should wish still to see me, still to meet me as we have met as yet in the festive throng of this court, I can have no objection as I can apprehend no peril. But if such rational and friendly intercourse should prove incompatible with your own peace of mind, be prudent, be wise, listen in time to my warning—I should willingly say my sisterly warning—and rush not into needless danger,—into unwarranted delusion. You will excuse me, Montalto, for speaking so unreservedly to you, but I have long been anxious thus to address you, as you may well see, in solemn earnest. Now, lead me back to the saloon, and reflect, while it is still time, upon this my heartfelt advice: that we continue to meet as friends only, or that we part ere it be too late for the happiness of your future life.”

Thus did Montalto and his relentless mistress re-enter together the marble ball-room; but ere another hour had elapsed, each had respectively withdrawn from the festive crowd.

As the Principe reached his apartments, he threw hastily to his page, his hat, his cloak, and his sword, and having desired him to re-

tire, he cast himself upon his lonely couch in frantic despair. "Fool! fool!" cried he, "why did I court this fatal issue—why did I constrain her thus so explicitly to declare her absolute indifference and contempt for me? How happy might we have long remained, had I been satisfied to rest upon our former terms of playful and tender friendship, without startling her by any expression of my more daring hopes and feelings. And now all is over!"

Thus the young Montalto brooded over his grief, and the broad daylight was streaming in fast, through the crevices of the oaken shutters, before sleep plunged his distracted senses into momentary oblivion.

In the meantime Doña Fernanda had retired to her rest in a calmer, though scarcely in a more cheerful state of mind.

"I wonder what can have affected my mistress in this manner?" said Rosetta, the favourite Sicilian tirewoman, to her companions, as they were dismissed with unusual celerity from the bedchamber. She has been for the last week in a state of the greatest excitement

about this festa, and now she returns from it, as if she had been dragged to a funeral. I can't but think that if we had been invited to such an entertainment, we should have come home in a gayer mood."

## CHAPTER II.

A WEEK had elapsed since the Governor's festival.

Doña Fernanda was sitting in her withdrawing-room, pensively gazing through the open lattices, upon her orange garden, and from thence upon the smooth and glassy surface of the bay which expanded beneath it, while the faithful Rosetta was decking with flowers the gold and silver cups and vases with which the room was profusely ornamented, when the following dialogue might have been overheard :

"Will your highness ride to-day?" said the attendant.

"No."

"Will she not take a little air in her horse-litter or in her Eastern palanquin?"

"No."

"I wish she would, at least, walk for a short time in her garden."

"No, I say; and I wish in my turn that you would wait till my desires are expressed, and not suggest them."

"I humbly beg your highness's pardon," said the undismayed Rosetta, scarcely suppressing a slight smile. "I certainly should not have taken such a liberty, had it not struck me that your highness had never yet completely recovered from the fatigues of the Governor's last entertainment."

"I never was better in all my life. If you can talk nothing but nonsense you may full as well be silent altogether."

Rosetta had obeyed this injunction during an almost incredible number of minutes, when suddenly the footsteps of several horses advancing at a rapid pace were overheard, and she was desired by Doña Fernanda to ascertain who was coming.

She returned shortly, announcing that it was the Principe di Montalto.

The gorgeous moss-rose which Fernanda was holding in her hand here accidentally dropped, and it was doubtless the effort she made to raise it which mantled her face with a hue of such deep crimson as fully to belie, for a moment at least, Rosetta's previous observations upon her fair mistress's appearance. However that may be, no emotion could be detected on her haughty brow, as she welcomed Montalto upon his entrance.

"You have been long a stranger here, fair sir," said she. "I suppose that, as I foresaw, the interminable walk for which I was indebted to you, the other night, fatigued you as much as it did me?"

"If I have been long absent I have doubtless not been much missed," replied Montalto, gravely; "nor would I have ventured now to have trespassed on your leisure had it not been to bid you a still longer farewell. You have heard, I suppose, the news from Calabria?"

"No; I have seen no one as yet this morning."

"Well, there has been a serious encounter

with the insurgents of the French party, in which our troops have been worsted, and Caraffa slain."

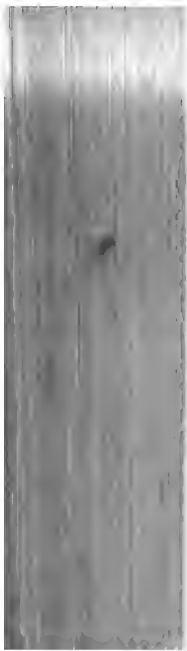
"The French party! I thought that it was quite extinct in southern Italy since the battle of Cerignola."

"No, Signora—not entirely. The agents of Louis of France have been more active again of late, in the hopes, no doubt, of seconding his present enterprise upon Milan, and this Calabrian insurrection appears now to have assumed rather formidable proportions."

"Indeed! Well, at all events it is a sad ending for poor Caraffa at his early age! I am truly grieved for Doña Luisa."

"Yes," muttered Montalto, bitterly; "she will weep for him, now that he is no more, after having driven him nearly wild with her caprices, when he was alive. But say not that it was a sad end for him; how else should a soldier die?"

"Perhaps he might just as well have never strayed away from his lady-love in a fit of the most uncalled-for jealousy. However that might be, allow me to ask how this intelligence



already written to  
appointment."

Again the flower  
hand, and again she  
singular that this  
time have produced  
upon her fair face  
pale as death itself.

"You appear surprised  
made this application."

"I am, indeed,"  
covering her self-protection  
with you, I shall be  
Duque entrusts you  
difficult and important

"Indeed," answered  
under his—"I can

there is amongst us that may be better qualified to lead them than I am—at least, by birth and station.”

“ Well, I will not give you further offence, by instituting any comparison between your experience and services, and those of some of the red-nosed and bald-headed veterans to whom Don Guzman used to insist upon my showing such marked civility. Allow me, instead, to inquire of you what can have determined you so suddenly to fly from this court, just as its most festive season is at hand?”

“ Surely it is in mere mockery that you ask me this question,” answered Montalto, sadly; “insensible and heartless as you would wish me to believe you to be, you cannot have quite forgotten our conversation the other night, and the reasons that you have given me for hating Palermo. Yes, Fernanda, I have reflected upon what you then said to me, and Heaven itself has afforded me this opportunity for throwing away a wearisome existence, or for winning a name which you, even you, will be proud to bear.”

"Really?" replied the incorrigible Fernanda. "I was not aware that scars and fevers, and the fatigues of a winter campaign so improved the appearance of cavaliers as to render them perfectly irresistible. If you are determined to try the experiment on yourself, at least do not make me responsible for the consequences of this boyish folly."

"Then may I believe, fairest Fernanda," said the ardent Montalto, seizing her hand, "that I misunderstood you, the other evening, and that you would not gladly see me fly from your presence?"

"I have said no such thing," answered she. "This much I may admit, that I could not willingly see you or any person here, with your youth and prospects, needlessly rush upon an enterprise where little glory can be achieved, and where much peril must be encountered. In other respects, you must judge for yourself, and remain at Palermo or leave it, as your affections or inclinations may detain you here or call you hence. But enough of this for to-day. Let me merely ask, in conclusion, if you have received any answer from the Governor?"

"No; I wrote to him early this morning, upon hearing the first intelligence of Caraffa's death, and I am now on my way to the palace, to receive, as I trust, his promise of the appointment."

"Would you very much mind going first as far as the Principessa di Colonna's, and telling her, with my love, that my barge is at her service this evening. If you will oblige me in this, pray lose no time, as it is already rather late for her to make any arrangements."

Having thus disposed of her lover, Fernanda lost no time in ordering her silken palanquin, that had been forwarded to her from Smyrna by one of her cousins, a distinguished member of the Knighthood of Rhodes, and she thus reached the vice-regal residence ere Montalto had succeeded in joining the Italian Principessa.

Issued from a younger branch of the house of Medina Sidonia, Doña Fernanda had been betrothed and wedded, at the early age of sixteen, to Don Guzman de la Sierra Hermosa, one of the proudest and most distinguished

veterans of the Spanish armies. A week after this ill-assorted union she accompanied her husband to Sicily, where he had already resided for some years as Governor and Captain-General of the Spanish occupying forces. The imperious disposition and never-slumbering jealousy of her aged spouse, which reduced Fernanda to a condition scarcely better than that of a state-prisoner, amid the grandeur which surrounded her, so deeply irritated and offended her that her life soon became one of continually mingled grief and altercation, until, at the end of a year and a half, it pleased heaven to recall Don Guzman to itself. Thus was his widow left, before the age of eighteen, in possession of an immense fortune, of an exalted title, and of what she infinitely preferred to either of these advantages—her absolute liberty. Whether from dread of the weary sea-voyage homewards, or from a very natural attachment to the lovely town of Palermo, she determined at first to postpone her return to Spain; and the marked honours and distinctions with which she was still treated, both by her successors in the vice-regal palace

and by their court, may have subsequently contributed to remove from her mind any notion of too hastily abandoning a sojourn so pleasant, for a land where she would naturally have felt herself to be almost a stranger.

When she entered, on this occasion, the private apartments of the Duquesa de San Lucar, Fernanda was welcomed with the usual tokens of affection and regard.

"My dear child," said her illustrious friend, "I was just going to you myself, to inquire how you were. How happy I am to see you!"

"I have been very remiss of late in waiting upon your highness," said Fernanda; "but I trust that with your usual kindness you will forgive me. How is the Duke?"

"He is well, though much distressed and annoyed at the news from Calabria, which, I suppose, you have heard?"

"I have; I was informed of Caraffa's death, as is not very unusual at Court, by the person who is desirous of succeeding him."

"Then you may have had more than one informant, for within the first hour, I believe

the Duke had received no less than four applications."

"And upon whom should you say that his choice is likely to fall?"

"I believe that he is much perplexed; for, to our great astonishment, the Principe de Montalto is among the applicants."

"I do not think it very likely," rejoined Fernanda, "that such a command will be entrusted to him."

A smile of deep meaning brightened for an instant the intelligent countenance of the Duchess, but it was repressed immediately, and fixing her eyes full upon her youthful friend, she said—

"I should almost think, my dear Fernanda, by your tone, that you would not approve of his appointment. I wish I could tell the Governor that you saw some reason for preferring that another selection should be made."

"I trust your highness will be graciously pleased not to use my name in the matter. I know that Don Guzman, who, on military subjects at least, was reckoned an authority,

would certainly not have entrusted such a command to so youthful a cavalier. More than this I am not justified in saying."

"Well, but my dear," replied the Duchess, "you must understand the difficult position in which we are placed. We must be very cautious of giving offence to a person of Montalto's rank and station here; and the reason that you suggest for denying his request would scarcely appear very flattering to him. Could not we find some other motive for detaining him here?"

"I am at a loss to understand your highness's meaning."

"It is plainly this, my dear. If I could ascertain who the fair lady may be, who would be most likely to have some influence over him, perhaps we could, through her, persuade him to change his mind upon this point, or urge upon him the fear of her displeasure in such a manner as to induce him not to incur it. Have you no notion to whom he may be attached?"

"Not the slightest," replied Fernanda, now thrown fully on her guard. "And surely

your highness may easily find among those around you, one more conversant than I have ever pretended to be, with the 'Chronique Scandaleuse' of your court."

"Well, but, my dear, if I were to consult such authorities, they would say that his homage is divided between you and Antonia Colonna."

"Indeed! Then, pray, be assured that my Italian rival can fairly claim by far the greater share; and, if your highness thinks fit, I can desire her to attend upon you, to receive what instructions the case may require."

With this observation Doña Fernanda retired, judging rightly, that no sooner would the Duchess be left alone, than she would communicate to the Viceroy the purport of their conversation. This Doña Inez did not fail to do forthwith, so that the Duke was fully apprised of what had occurred between his wife and her fair visitant, ere the Prince of Montalto was announced.

"Your highness," said the latter, after the usual compliments had been exchanged, "has

doubtless received the letter I ventured to address to you this morning. May I trust that it has been honoured by your favourable consideration?"

"Can you doubt it, my dear young friend?" replied the Duke. "Evidently nothing could be more in accordance with my own wishes, than to comply with your desire in this matter. Allow me, however, to say, that I never was more surprised than when I received your communication."

"Indeed, Sir!"

"Assuredly. What on earth can induce you, at your age and with such brilliant prospects before you, to enter upon the desperate warfare, which is now raging in Calabria, I am entirely at a loss to imagine!"

"Your highness need not be reminded of the bright and glorious example we shall be attempting to follow, in forsaking the frivolous pastimes of a court for nobler and more manly pursuits."

"If I am to take this compliment as in any way addressed to me, Montalto, allow me to say, that I have ever avoided, in as much as

I honourably could, the description of service which you are desirous to undertake. Where gallant armies are brought into the field—where the chivalry of rival nations contend for victory—there I have always endeavoured that the standard of San Lucar should not be missed. But when war is to be carried on merely against a rebellious peasantry, and the wasting fevers of a pestilential clime,—there I have never sought a premature and unhonoured end. The experience of a long life leads me to believe that I am fully justified in recommending to all, in whom I take an interest, a similar course. Surely, Montalto, you cannot be offended at my offering to you in these terms my paternal advice?”

“I trust that your highness will be assured that I am most deeply grateful for it, and that I should most certainly follow it, were I not, for reasons to which I can make no sort of allusion, determined to embark in the first warlike enterprise which offers. My resolution, Señor, upon this point, is positively fixed. You must wish, I should conceive, that poor Caraffa should be immediately replaced, and

by one of us; for this purpose, you were kind enough, but just now, to say, that I was not undeserving of your confidence and trust. I am ready, if you think fit, to start this very night; nor do I see from what quarter any reasonable objection can proceed."

"Oh, that is quite another matter!" rejoined the Duke, endeavouring to suppress a slight smile. "I shall have criticisms enough to deal with. Why, there was, within the last five minutes, the Marquesa de Sierra Hermosa entering here, in the strongest terms possible, her protest against your appointment."

"Has she been here, Señor, this morning?" exclaimed Montalto, in great surprise.

"She has, indeed; nor should I be quite justified in saying with what apparent interest she spoke on the matter."

"I cannot say that I feel very grateful for the *premura* that she has shown, in attempting to deprive me of your highness's confidence and good-will in this matter. I shall scarcely believe, however, that with you her judgment can have had much weight."

"Nay, but she invoked that of the departed Don Guzman himself."

"In truth, sir," replied Montalto, hastily, "this is at all events the first indication of deference that she has ever shown to any of his opinions. The compliment comes rather late."

"I vow, my dear Montalto, that I hardly know you, to-day; you seem inclined to quarrel with your very best friends. Here is one of the loveliest and brightest ornaments of our poor court absolutely breathless with anxiety at the notion that you are going to leave us, and you construe that sentiment almost into an affront. But it is always so. Ah, *Si Gioventu sapeva!*"

"Nay, sir," answered Montalto, now recalled to his usual equanimity; "but I misunderstood your highness. I had conceived that Doña Fernanda had declared me, in her estimation, unfit for the command I had solicited, not that she had expressed any objection to my leaving Palermo."

"And may I ask, fair sir," retorted the Governor, "in what terms you expect that this

objection should be expressed by her, supposing it to exist. Was she to come here, and swear to me, that she would drown herself in yonder bay, or hang herself in her garters, at the mere notion that you might be called away from hence. Come, come, if you will reflect for a moment, you will see that you are a happier man than you deserve to be, and you will be convinced that the balance of the account is against you! I will say no more, as I do not wish to intrude upon your feelings, or indiscreetly to dive into them; but I sincerely hope that as you have within your reach the most valuable prize that this earth can afford, you will not embitter your whole future existence by voluntarily casting it away. Now, excuse me for leaving you, as I must write to Madrid upon this unfortunate business; and let me hear again from you to-morrow, if you are still intent upon going to Calabria."

Montalto here withdrew; but so certain did the Governor feel that he would receive no intimation to the foregoing effect from the young Sicilian, that he, that very evening, appointed the Conte di Castelnegro to replace the ill-fated Caraffa.

## CHAPTER III.

THE sentiments of joy and exultation which swelled Montalto's heart, as he retired from the Viceroy's presence, can better be imagined than described: the fondest and brightest dream of his life was realized.

"So, she is not insensible after all!" exclaimed he. "Her rebellious spirit has already learned to stoop—she can be, she shall be won. Proud and determined as she is, she shall find me her equal, even with her own weapons."

The young Principe was still absorbed by these triumphant aspirations and hopes, when he retired to his couch, there to find the first

tranquil slumbers which had visited his pillow, since his ominous farewell with Doña Fernanda at the Viceroy's festa.

On the following morning, at an unusually early hour, he waited on his wayward mistress. He could well perceive that she felt more anxiety than she was willing to testify upon beholding him, and her voice was tremulous with some ill-disguised sentiment, when she inquired if he still intended proceeding to Palermo.

"I await the Viceroy's decision," replied Montalto, impelled by an irresistible desire to probe, for a moment, the secret feelings of his fair interrogator.

"Very well," rejoined she, coldly; "I have expressed to you my humble opinion, and as it has but such poor weight in your eyes, I shall refrain from any further observation. How soon do you leave Palermo?"

"It must be almost immediately, if I do go."

"What, even before the approaching tournament!"

"I am afraid so. You seem surprised that I should not wait for it."

"I, Signor? Not in the least, I assure you. I was only thinking to whom I can now entrust my colours. I suppose I had better send them to Luis de la Cerda, as he is my kinsman. He is reckoned a good lance, is not he?"

"Certainly," rejoined Montalto, now in his turn rather staggered; "but you must know how much the Duke will desire that your choice should fall upon a Sicilian cavalier, and," continued he in a faltering voice, "could I but think that such unspeakable honour might be conferred upon me, I should most gladly defer, in that hope alone, my intended departure."

Fernanda was seeking how she might best reply, so as to produce the desired impression upon her lover's mind, without involving herself in any serious or permanent engagement, when the sprightly Rosetta entered in all haste, bearing a despatch for her, from the Vice-queen.

A slight smile of triumph might have been detected upon the countenance of the Spanish beauty, as she hastily perused this missive; and she had recovered more than her usual self-possession, when, turning coldly to Mon-

talto, she informed him that the Conte di Castelnegro had been appointed to replace the Conte Caraffa.

"Indeed!" replied he. "What do you think of the selection?"

"It appears to me the best that could possibly be made among your countrymen."

"I should not feel very much indebted to you for the compliment, fair lady," replied he, smiling, "had you not already made me aware of the poor estimation in which you hold my military talents."

Fernanda could not but observe, with her usual quickness of perception, that Montalto bore the announcement of his rival candidate's success with an equanimity far different from the mood which he had displayed on the previous day; and the whole truth now beginning to dawn upon her, she fixed her eyes full upon the Principe, and said:

"Shall I complete my criticism by a word of advice?"

"Decidedly," replied he; "none can be more natural associates than censure and admonition."

"Then allow me to recommend to you, if ever you feel inclined to set your affections upon any woman of moderate sense and intelligence, not to speculate too much upon her want of sufficient penetration to discern what may really interest her."

"I am at a loss, I protest," replied Montalto, a little abashed, "to comprehend how I can have shown that this most judicious counsel was required."

"I will tell you, if you please. You were doubtless determined, last night, to renounce all notion of proceeding to Calabria, and you thought it in good taste and in good feeling to leave me in the contrary impression until I myself should, thanks to my own information or my own inductions, have ascertained the fact. I am of course very much flattered by this mark of confidence, to say no more."

"Santa Maria, lovely Fernanda," exclaimed Montalto, "if you will teach me how we unfortunate cavaliers are to avoid encountering, in some manner or other, fair ladies' caprices, you will bestow upon me a most inestimable benefit. Take my case, for instance. You

I me, not a week since, that I must cease love you as I do the breath of heaven, or withdraw from the train of your admirers. To obey you on the first point is impossible. Endeavour so to do on the second: you will be displeased. I renounce my intention of leaving Palermo: you then seem more satisfied with me than before, though in this, and in the rest, I have been acting solely according to what notions you have allowed me to form respecting your own wishes."

"Come, come, Principe di Montalto," retorted Fernanda, "this is no exact version of the tale, as you well know. However, perhaps I had better distinctly understand, that though rejoicing, as all your friends must, that I should not rush upon a mad adventure, I cannot, in common fairness, allow you to apprehend any extreme consequences for my happiness and health, should you unfortunately be called away from here. I say, therefore, do not make me accountable for your plans that you may either form or abandon."

"I assure you, Madam, that I am far from

being so presumptuous," replied Montalvo;  
"but if I still continue to inhabit my native  
city, I suppose that my residence there ~~may~~  
be attributed to other motives than those you  
suggest."

"Most decidedly," said Fernanda; "and  
there are enough of your fair countrywomen  
here, well worthy of your homage, for you easily  
to make among them a not unfitting selection."

"Well, but," replied the Principe, again  
alarmed at the tone the conversation appeared  
on the point of assuming, "if my country-  
women allow themselves to be far surpassed in  
every attraction by their foreign rivals, I can-  
not see that our devotion should be fairly  
restricted to them alone."

"Of that," retorted his mistress, "you are  
the better judge yourself, always bearing in  
mind what I stated to you when we parted at  
the festa, and upon that point my opinions  
remain entirely unaltered. Now, if you please,  
we will change the subject; and to show you  
that I am neither offended, as just now you  
seemed to suggest, or in such dread of your  
presence as to be constrained to fly from it,

ill not object, should you be disengaged, to  
 apt of your company during an hour's ride,  
 le I give my favourite Isabel the exercise  
 ich my equerry tells me she so much re-  
 res."

Could we be induced to believe that Doña  
 nanda was ever betrayed, upon any occa-  
 sion, into speaking what was not the sole,  
 pure, and sincere truth, we should be in-  
 clined to suspect that she had another, though  
 secret and unavowed motive, in conferring,  
 the first time, so distinguished a favour  
 on her lover. However that may be, cer-  
 tainly, on the previous evening, the Princess  
 Isabella was distinctly heard affirming, before  
 her Spanish rival, that the Principe di Montalto  
 could have no reason for regretting to leave  
 her at that time. Certainly, also, Fer-  
 nanda so directed the course of her ride with  
 the youthful cavalier and their suite, that the  
 Italian beauty could distinctly view their  
 progress from the garden, where she habitually  
 spent that portion of the afternoon, surrounded  
 by her more devoted admirers. To use the  
 words of the Spaniard, we say no more.

The weather was lovely, and the fresh sea-breeze sweeping gently over the perfumed orange and citron groves which surrounded the fair city, while, outstripping their attendants, the youthful couple advanced far into the enchanted country without. As the gay and animated conversation proceeded, Montalto could not but remark that his charger was unusually restless, and so imparted its spirit to Isabel herself, that she would have been quite unmanageable for any one whose hand had been less light, and seat less firm, than that of her intrepid mistress. As it was, and notwithstanding the courage and address displayed by Doña Fernanda, her companion did not forbear expressing more than once his apprehension that no small degree of peril was incurred by the fair equestrian. This notion she derided in her usual tone of playful sarcasm, and seemed, at each new observation, to find an additional pleasure in putting her skill to the test, and exciting Montalto's alarm.

When they had ridden for more than half an hour, the road they had chosen opened upon a large grassy plain extending, by a

gradually increasing slope, to the summit of one of the hills which encircle the city. This plain was separated from the road by a ravine of some depth, towards which Fernanda was turning the head of her palfrey, when the Principe exclaimed :

“ Surely, Signora, you are not going to attempt to cross that ? ”

“ Most decidedly,” returned she. “ Isabel can do it very well if she chooses, and I am bent upon putting her to her speed upon that noble expanse before us. If you prefer the road, I can leave you there, in the enjoyment of the society of my equerry.”

Seeing that remonstrance would only increase his companion’s determination to hazard the experiment, Montalto conceived that the best course would be for himself to clear the obstacle; but even the example thus given to her was not sufficient to induce the startled Isabel to follow. Fernanda had recourse first to words of encouragement, then to expressions of indignation, and finally to her riding-whip, but the restive palfrey plunged, reared, and gave no token of obedience.

"Come back, pray, Signor," cried Fernanda, whose spirit was now fully aroused. "She has never yet overcome me, and she shall not to-day. Stand behind her and strike her yourself."

"I shall certainly do no such thing," said Montalto, at the same time recrossing the ravine. "Be wise, I conjure you, and let us proceed along the road until we find some less difficult passage."

"She shall go over here, on this very spot," retorted Fernanda. "Lend me your riding-rod, which is heavier than mine, and then cross again yourself; I am sure she will follow this time."

Doña Fernanda was right. When Montalto most unwillingly complied with this injunction, Isabel did follow; but to show her resentment for the unusually harsh treatment she had received, no sooner did she alight on the soft green sward, than, after a plunge which would have unseated any ordinary horsewoman, she seized the bit between her teeth, and flew off at her utmost speed.

For a few moments Montalto attempted to

keep pace with the infuriated animal; but soon judging that if they thus proceeded together, the two steeds could but mutually over-excite each other, he informed his wayward companion, that he thought it safer for her that he should rein in his own horse.

"I believe you are right," whispered the breathless, though all undismayed Fernanda. "Isabel has never done this before, and I will give her such a lesson as to deter her from repeating the experiment. Follow me, if you can, at a slower pace."

With these words they parted, Fernanda still urging the frantic Isabel with continued applications of Montalto's heavy riding-whip, while her lover, in anxious suspense, watched her mad progress as she ascended, with unabated speed, the acclivity before them, until the rash horsewoman was lost to his view. He then hastened forward, and when he had in his turn cleared the summit of the hill, he beheld, at some distance in the valley below, Fernanda dismounted, and attempting to raise her steed, which lay prostrate upon the earth.

Setting spurs to his horse, the Principe ~~was~~ soon again by the side of his mistress, ~~who~~, with the bridle in one hand, and the riding-rod in the other, was in vain endeavouring to compel Isabel to rise.

"My arm is so tired, that I can strike her no more," exclaimed Fernanda, as Montalvo joined her. "I never saw her so obstinate before. You would think that she has not strength to get up now, after having been quite unmanageable scarcely a minute since."

Certainly, never did the incomparable Fernanda look more lovely than on this occasion, as, flushed with the excitement of the exercise, and smiling now at her own impetuosity, she raised her riding-hat from her glowing brow, and released the dishevelled tresses of her matchless fair hair. Still, the feeling which she then inspired in her lover, was certainly not one of unmingled admiration, and there was an unusual coldness in his voice, when, having dismounted from his own horse, to examine the prostrate steed, he exclaimed—

"You may spare your strength, Signora : Isabel cannot live many minutes more."

"What can you mean?" cried his terrified companion, now pale with undisguised alarm.

"Simply, that by impelling her so rashly up yonder acclivity, you have broken her wind. See, she is now breathing her last, and that is her life-blood which is escaping so fast from her nostrils and her mouth."

It was, indeed, but too true. The noble animal was dying. In vain did the breathless Fernanda, now plunged in an agony of grief and remorse, kneel by her adored Isabel, and frantically call upon every Saint in the Calendar to arrest the fast-receding tide of life. The poor palfrey, as if still attempting to respond to the fond endearments of her mistress, faintly raised, once or twice, her head from the fatal ground, and then, after a few convulsive struggles, expired.

Fast flowed Fernanda's tears on the inanimate body of her favourite, but her prayers and her distress were now alike unavailing; and Montalto was soon constrained to remind her, that they should think of returning to the town ere the shades of evening had closed entirely upon them. Their suite, whom they had left far

when the old squerry was near  
whole party proceeded homeward  
pace.

For many minutes, the silen  
unbroken between Montalto and  
companion. At last, she raised  
eyes, and attempting to smile, she

"I fear that you will think  
greater virago than I am."

"No, indeed, I assure you," wa  
consolatory reply.

"Well, but," resumed the disc  
nanda, "who would have thoug  
poor and much-loved Isabel was n  
God knows that I had no intenti  
her the slightest injury."

"It is often so, Signora. What

will faint at the sight of the blood which a schoolboy's knife has drawn."

"I think you might spare me your reproofs," retorted Fernanda, "seeing how sincerely distressed I am. But men are always so, and talking as if they alone had feelings which could be trifled with and trampled upon."

Thus the young couple reached the town, bearing back, alas, sentiments of estrangement and displeasure, from the memorable ride upon which they had started with such joyous expectation. When they had entered the court-yard of Doña Fernanda's palazzo, Montalto assisted her to alight, and would then have withdrawn, but his heart smote him at the idea of leaving his mistress in their present and mutual frame of mind. He therefore was impelled to follow her into her withdrawing-room, and from thence into her sumptuous dressing-room, where, in company with one other attendant, the faithful Rosetta was awaiting her.

Fernanda seemed surprised on beholding this unexpected and unauthorised intrusion;

but though slightly blushing, she exclaimed, with her usual presence of mind—

“ You have come for that scarf, I suppose, which, as you advised, I shall send to Don Luis de La Cerda. There it is on that chair; you can take charge of it, and mind that it be possessed and worn by my true knight alone.”

These last words were accompanied by such a smile as would certainly have thrown Montalto again at the feet of his fascinating mistress, had it not been for the presence of her tire-women. He pressed her hand to his lips, and promising that he would faithfully fulfil her intentions, he triumphantly bore away, not to the house of Don Luis, but to his own, the deeply-prized token.

Alas for human infirmity! Fernanda had been obliged to repurchase, at a heavy cost, feelings far less enthusiastic and unalloyed than those which her impetuous and wayward disposition had caused her to forfeit. Indeed, it is doubtful whether, after that day, Montalto would ever again have felt the entire confidence and unmingled devotion which had

previously led him to consider the lovely Spaniard as the heaven-appointed partner of his life, had not circumstances occurred, which were destined to goad his reckless passion beyond all the restraints of reason and of reflection.

## CHAPTER IV.

A VERY few days after the accident which we have just related, a gay and richly attired party was seated in the Viceroy's barge, as it was gliding in the soft twilight through the Bay of Palermo, closely followed by another, from which the festive strains of a well-appointed band of Italian serenaders were borne far and wide upon the bosom of the tranquil waters.

"Is it true, Fernanda," said the Duchess, "that you have lost your lovely Isabel? Nay, I see it is, by your looks. How did it occur?"

"Your highness must excuse my answering.

returned she; "I suppose it was a judgment of Heaven upon me, for having forfeited my reputation by riding out with a single cavalier."

"So, it is as I thought," replied the Duchess, smiling. "The Principe di Montalto is responsible, and is, of course, bound to offer you another steed."

"God knows how willingly I would pay the forfeit, whether I deserve it or not," said Montalto; "but I much fear that it would be scarcely accepted by the fair saint to whom it would be proffered."

"There you are quite right, Signor," exclaimed Fernanda.

"Few people will buy horses at Palermo, I should think," interposed the Princess Colonna, "as long as Spinosa is here."

"Spinosa! who is he?" inquired the Duchess.

"Does your highness really mean us to suppose that you have not seen Spinosa?"

"I do, indeed, my dear Antonia, and, what is more, I never heard his name mentioned before."

"Well, this does show," answered the fair Italian, "how very vigilant and effective is

the Viceroy's police. Pray do not betray me to him, madam, if I inform you that Spinoso is a Florentine jeweller, who has come over here with the most beauteous gems and trinkets in the sight of which the eye of woman has ever revelled. You, of course, Fernanda, have seen them."

"To be sure I have, and more than once: how splendid the diamonds are!"

"They are, indeed," replied the Princess Colonna; "but what do you think of the pearl necklace?"

"It is the finest, of its kind, I ever saw; but if I could choose among all the jewels, there is another that I would far prefer."

"You mean the ruby and diamond brooch."

"Exactly so," replied Fernanda. "Indeed her highness must see it, were it only out of mere curiosity. And yet really I think, upon the whole, that the Viceroy should oblige this strolling jeweller to show his treasures to our fathers and husbands only, and not allow him to have access to us, and unsettle our minds with such glorious visions."

"Yes, but what are we to do, Fernanda, who have lost our fathers, and have no husbands, or as good as none?"

"Well, I cannot say, Antonia, excepting that we decidedly should be precluded more than any others from receiving such visitors."

"Doña Fernanda seems to suggest that this Spinosa's jewels are worth, in her eyes, any price that a lady can give."

This observation was uttered by a middle-aged matron, who never neglected an opportunity of showing her jealousy and dislike of the fair daughter of Spain.

Fernanda looked her in the face, and calmly replied—"If so, Signora, pray observe that I was speaking to the Princess Colonna, who, of course with the exception of her highness, is the only person I see here that would have it in her power to give the full value for them."

At this retort, the ladies slightly blushed, the cavaliers laughed aloud, and the Duchess felt herself called upon to change the conversation.

Soon afterwards, the party returned to the shore, and Montalto was preparing to escort

Doña Fernanda to her house, when Doña Inez exclaimed—

“I have a message, Principe, for you from the Governor—will you excuse my claiming your hand while I impart it to you?”

The Sicilian answered by a respectful bow, and proceeded with the Duchess to the palace.

“My husband much regrets,” said she to him, when they were alone, “that you should have been of late so rare a visitor. He trusts that you have forgiven him the Conte de Castelnegro’s appointment.”

These words were so uttered as evidently to provoke a greater degree of confidence than Montalto had yet shown to the Vice-queen. He smiled, blushed slightly as their eyes met, and said—

“I believe your highness is well aware that such assuredly is not the motive of the remissness that you have been so kind as to remark.”

“If I have succeeded in guessing at any other reason, it is fortunate for me, Signor, for I fear that I should have obtained but little information in any more authentic manner.”

“Your highness wrongs me, I protest,”

answered Montalto, with a deeper blush: "gladly would I impart to you all my hopes, all my apprehensions, all my feelings, could I believe that the subject was one in which you might condescend to take some interest."

"The very greatest, I can assure you," replied Doña Inez, "and I can hardly tell you how much both I and the Governor rejoice at the very favourable turn which matters appear to us to be taking of late."

"I am happy to hear you say so," answered Montalto, "though I fear I am far, very far yet from obtaining what is now the object of my life."

"Not so very far, I trust, Signor. But if I were to make so bold as to offer my humble suggestion, I should be tempted to inquire, whether you yourself are not rather too diffident, considering the circumstances of the case. We, the daughters of Spain, must be boldly courted, and boldly won."

A moment of silence here ensued; but it was soon broken by Montalto.

"As your highness is so kind," said he, "as to take some concern in what affects me so deeply,

I should be much tempted indeed to solicit from you a word of advice."

"By all means," answered Doña Inez.

"Then allow me, first, madam, to inquire whether your highness remarked anything particular in Doña Fernanda's conversation this morning?"

"Most decidedly. All we ladies are accused, I believe, of being inordinately fond of every species of ornament; yet never have I heard of such enthusiastic devotion as that expressed by Fernanda to-day for this Florentine's jewels."

"I perceive, madam, that our thoughts concur. Now, does your highness think that I might venture to offer one of these to your haughty predecessor?"

"Well, do you know that I should very much recommend you to make the experiment. If she accepts so costly a present, it will be the greatest and most decisive mark of favour that you could well expect her to show; and even should she refuse it, she cannot but be grateful for the attention, and you will be in no worse condition than at present."

Thus encouraged, Montalto, after having

reconducted the Duchess to the gates of her palace, proceeded at once to Spinosa's residence. There he most attentively scrutinized all the Italian's treasures, the choicest of which appeared to him, unquestionably, to be the ruby and diamond brooch, of which Doña Fernanda had spoken in such rapturous terms. It was, indeed, a masterpiece of goldsmith's craft. Great and gorgeous as was the beauty, both of the diamond and of the ruby heart which were placed in the centre of the ornament, the eye dwelt with scarcely less pleasure on the graceful badge which encompassed and entwined them, and on which was traced, with the most admirable skill, and in the choicest brilliants, the device, "*Uniti per sempre.*" Though the subtle Italian's charge for this chef-d'œuvre of his art was considerable, we trust that we need not say that the price was most cheerfully paid by Montalto, who departed, enchanted with his purchase, and yet already overawed at the prospect of having so soon to bring his love-dreams to their crisis, by laying at the feet of his mistress so direct a token of his devotedness.

On the following day, he was again at the side of Doña Fernanda, with the precious jewel concealed in his doublet; but how was he to muster sufficient courage to present it? The more deeply he had resolved, ere he had entered the room, to make the attempt forthwith—the more anxiously he had prepared the few set words with which the token was to be tendered, the more his heart appeared to fail him when the expected moment approached.

Yet, never could a more favourable opportunity have been contemplated than that which then occurred. The heat was intense, and as if scarcely revived by the gently-embalmed breeze, which was wafted from her orange gardens through the open casement, Fernanda was reclining upon her silken couch in an attitude which contrasted strangely with her usual erect and lively bearing. The Principe paused for a moment, as if afraid to disturb her repose, but there was in her smile and voice a languishing allurements which he had never beheld there before, when she thus addressed him—

“You are come, I trust, to offer your excuses

for having so suddenly and so completely deserted me yesterday."

"You must have remarked, fair Signora, that I had really no choice in the matter."

"Perhaps so; and yet you certainly did not seem much to regret the Duchess's commands during the conversation which ensued between you: as far as I could judge, you were anything but an uninterested listener."

"The subject, Fernanda, was one which must ever affect me more deeply than any other. I hope I need not add that I was speaking of you."

"Indeed; and may I make so bold as to ask, how so great an honour can have devolved upon me?"

"Do you wish me really to tell you what took place between us?"

"Decidedly."

"Then do not be offended if I say, that Doña Inez was complimenting me upon what she considered to be the successful progress of my addresses to the lady of my heart."

"Indeed! And you, I suppose, accepted the compliment with becoming modesty?"

"No, I assure you, Signora, such was certainly not my answer—though, so perplexed was I, that I can scarcely recall what it may have been."

"And what else did her highness add?"

"How sincerely both she and the Vicary hoped that you might soon be inclined to show a little more favour or pity to your devoted follower."

"And what more can they or he expect from me, than what I have already conceded, and what I daily grant? Surely no one knows better than the Duchess, how determined I am not to enter lightly upon a second marriage."

Montalto was seated upon a stool at the foot of the couch upon which his mistress was reclining, and, moved doubtless by the recollection of Doña Inez's recent advice, or by the more tender and subdued tones of Fernanda's voice, he for the first time found courage to fall at her feet. There, seizing her fairy hand, he poured forth at length the whole tale of his ardent and all-absorbing love.

"Think me not ungrateful, Fernanda," exclaimed he. "Think not that I undervalue these

slight but priceless marks of regard which you perchance have shown me of late. And yet believe me, when I solemnly affirm, that I cannot continue to live thus in the unceasing anguish of ever-doubting, and all unrequited affection. What is mere sport to your light heart, is the death of every hour to mine. Say that you cannot love me, say that you consider me unworthy of your notice and preference, and you will pronounce a doom which I feel to be well deserved, and for which I am not unprepared. But do not expect that the fevered blood which boils in my veins can be so subdued, as to subside into the listless indifference and obedience which you require. I cannot promise what I feel I cannot perform."

"Silly child!" replied Fernanda, as her slender hand parted the raven locks which clustered around the brow of her youthful suitor. "It is fortunate indeed that I have a little more experience than you. If you really love me, should you not be happy now?—— Why hasten to bring this pure communion of our hearts to its inevitable end? Why call

upon the cold hand of wedlock so early to chill and to blight the glowing promise of our present affection? If you had endured, as I have, the weight of that chain, the hourly rebellion of the soul against that irrevocable and immutable law, you would not thus precipitate the fatal catastrophe, which must for ever dispel our enchanted dream. I see that you cannot believe me, for when did love ever listen to reason, or mistrust marriage? But I shall be wiser than you."

"Fernanda," eagerly exclaimed Montalto, "if I could believe that there is neither aversion nor contempt for me in these your doubts and misgivings—if it is wedlock alone that you dread, while you yet would bestow one sainted smile of sympathy or of compassion upon my distracted prayer, how gladly would I answer: Let not our love make that fatal experiment. Are we not both free now? Why should the conventional decrees of a heartless world arrest the heaven-born impulse which now, even now, would blend our kindred souls in their appointed union? Why such care for the morrow, Fernanda, when this day is scarcely

our own. See, I am at your feet, repeating the deathless cry of the love-frenzied poet, '*Una notte e mai fosse l'alba!*' "

As these words were uttered with the fervour of his age and disposition, Montalto's face was buried in the loose folds of Fernanda's morning attire, while his forehead rested upon her hand. This she now withdrew, and after a strong though unavailing effort to recover her usual tone, she replied—

"Well, this is a construction that I did not quite expect. Let go my hand, Montalto, I insist upon it, or I must call Rosetta. Here am I, endeavouring to persuade you that the esteem and friendship which I fully admit that I bear to you, are not of so irresistible and headlong a nature as to induce me to break the tacit vow that I have formed, not hastily again to part with my freedom; and how do you interpret this declaration? That I am ready, forsooth, to sacrifice life, and even honour itself, to the ungovernable passion that you are pleased to imagine."

"Nay, but dearest Fernanda, be not so harsh and unjust. The object of my love is

but that of every love with which the surpassing beauty of woman has ever maddened the heart of man. I feel it to be as imperishable as it is uncontrollable, and what I feel I have said, laying at your feet that whole love for my whole life. Forgive me, if, in answer to the peculiar objection which you seemed to raise, I gave to passion its most impassioned expression, or remember, at least, that the real culprit is not me, but Petrarcha."

"Well, I will see if I can forgive him, and you too; but you really must first assume some less extraordinary attitude. Sit on the stool, if you please, but sit up, at least, and release my hand, which I really think that you must have bruised by this time. That is right—a little further, still."

A moment's silence here ensued, and it was first broken by Fernanda herself—

"Was that verse Petrarcha's?" said she, thoughtfully. "Repeat it again. It is nobly worded, indeed," continued she, when her lover had complied with this injunction.

"And nobly conceived, too, Fernanda."

"That is quite another question. As the

wild effusion of a poet's delirium, perhaps, indeed, both the sentiment and the expression may be admired; still the moral must not the less be absolutely rejected in real life, by all who are not prepared to violate every law which God has prescribed, or man has framed. Pray do not ever forget that again, Signor; and now," continued Fernanda, "I will own to you, that there is one point upon which I am inclined to think that there is some truth in what you have lately said. I believe that it really may be not only unprofitable, but perilous, for us to prolong, as much as I originally contemplated and wished, our intercourse upon its present footing. I know that such is the opinion of the Duchess, in whose friendship and judgment I have entire confidence. I would, perhaps, even admit, that, between my strong aversion to a second engagement, and my feelings of real esteem for you, you may shortly have a right to expect that I should pronounce. I shall, therefore, frankly tell you, that, from different but concurrent motives, I shall perhaps myself be obliged, ere long, to decide. I yesterday received letters

from Spain, urging me to return there at my earliest leisure, my presence being absolutely required for some matters upon which a portion of my fortune must depend. Within six weeks, I must obey this summons, and, if agreeable to you, I will determine, in the interval, whether I will cross the seas in company with Don Luis de la Cerda, who is my cousin, and natural protector, or with one," added she, slightly blushing, "who may claim a more decisive right to defend me against the Corsairs of Barbary. I suppose you will be satisfied to grant me that short respite, to resolve whether I really can confide to one so young and so very thoughtless as you, the future destiny of my life."

The Principe conveyed his rapturous assent by pressing several times to his lips the slight hand which he had again seized.

"Very well," resumed Doña Fernanda; "but remember that, during the aforesaid space of time, I am not to be persecuted with those unceasing testimonies of jealousy and of passion with which you are all too apt to overwhelm your ill-fated mistresses, whenever

I think that they are inclined to yield. I  
to remain free—as free as air, and to hear  
more of the thousand deaths you are pre-  
ing to die, until the six weeks be fully  
psed.”

“I shall certainly do my best to live till  
n,” replied Montalto, smiling.

“Pray do,” said Fernanda; “and now,  
ve me for to-day, as this weather oppresses  
much, and I need not conceal from you,  
at our conversation has rather agitated  
.”

END OF VOL. II.



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# LOVE AND AMBITION.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "ROCKINGHAM."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

HENRY COLBURN, PUBLISHER,

GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1851.



# FERNANDA.

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## CHAPTER V.

WHEN Montalto retired from this interview, his feelings were in such a state of enraptured confusion and excitement, that he could scarcely so collect his thoughts as clearly to define the whole extent of his happiness. Could it be possible? Had not his senses deceived him, or was the goal of all his wildest hopes, which, a few short hours before, showed but as a faint and scarcely perceptible point on the far distant horizon of his love-dreams, now absolutely at hand, and within his reach?

“ Mine, mine,” exclaimed he, as he mounted

his charger. "I have read it in the subdued look of her heavenly eyes; I have heard it in the tremulous tones of her faltering voice. Within six weeks she *will* be—she *shall* be mine." Urging rapidly his steed, he soon reached the court of his own palace, and rushing into his apartment, he threw himself headlong upon his silken divan, there to meditate in blissful solitude upon this unhoped-for change in his fortunes. Nor was Petrarcha, the best-beloved poet, to whom he owed so deep a debt of gratitude, forgotten in that hour.

"Pure, deathless spirit!" exclaimed he. "Thine, thine is the victory! I ever felt—I ever knew, that thy fraternal spirit would, from the heaven thou hast reached, and to which thou hast so often allured me, watch over my kindred passion, and ensure its triumph! It is thy voice which has prevailed; and as long as thy love-cry can re-echo upon her heart, so long will that heart be mine, in spite of all its struggles."

While he was thus musing, he felt the jewel which he had purchased for Fernanda, and

which he had concealed in his doublet, pressing upon his chest.

"Ah! I had forgotten thee," cried he; "but soon shalt thou sit there, where all thy brilliancy will add but one faint ray to beauty far more dazzling than thine own. Yet how, even now, shall I venture to present thee?"

For some minutes, Montalto seemed lost in a deep but not painful reverie: his reflections were interrupted by a low knock at his door.

"Come in," cried he, starting up, and the smiling face of Rosetta appeared.

"Have you any message for me, Carina?"

"Oh, no, Signor!" said the blushing attendant. "I understood that you were out, and I came but to see if my uncle were here."

We must not forget to inform the reader that the fair Rosetta was niece to Montalto's equerry, and that, as such, she was a frequent visitor at the Principe's palace; but though a few words of civility were exchanged between them whenever they met, Montalto had never succeeded in drawing the cautious tirewoman into any communication, bearing, whether di-

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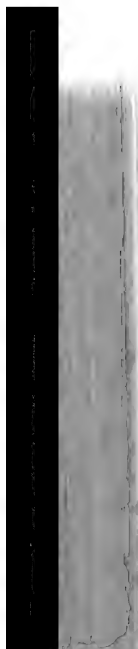
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newed his supplications in such vehement and impassioned terms, that he finally prevailed. The brooch had been transferred to Fernanda's vest, the ring already removed from her finger, and the momentous bargain appeared to be concluded, when, unfortunately, for the first time, just as she was parting with the relic of Don Guzman's earliest attentions, her eye was attracted by the inscription, which had so lately been engraved there.

"Why, what on earth is this!" cried she, in the greatest amazement; "who can have placed those letters here?"

She attentively perused them, and then, fixing her eyes upon Montalto, she said,—

"Of course the exchange is impossible now."

"Nay, but why am I to be responsible for this inscription?" said Montalto; "lend me the ring, and let me see what it is."

Scarcely recovered from the surprise which the little incident had caused to her, Fernanda imprudently yielded to this last request of her lover, and no sooner was the ring in Montalto's hands, than he positively declined to return it, and as positively refused to take

back the brooch. Prayers, supplications, and menaces were alike unavailing. In vain Fernanda actually knelt at his feet, to claim back her ring,—in vain she threatened to have it seized at his house by the vice-regal police, and then to throw Spinosa's costly ornament into the sea. Montalto remained inflexible. He had now learned his power, and was determined, in his turn, to use it. It is true that his heart sank strangely within him, when he saw his haughty mistress actually in tears; still he did not yield, and after a long altercation, in which the really incensed Fernanda vowed by every saint in the calendar, that she would never forgive him, and never would see him again, he finally departed, without the brooch, and with the mystical ring.

His first care was to proceed to Spinosa's house; and as the precious circlet was far too small for any of his fingers, he desired the Italian to fix it upon a strong gold chain, and to secure this firmly round his own neck. He then, without loss of time, returned to the vice-regal palace.

No sooner did Doña Inez behold him, than

she eagerly inquired how his enterprise had prospered. He informed her of his success, without concealing from her how serious had been the resistance of his mistress, and upon what terms they had parted.

“Do not distress yourself on that latter account,” said the Duchess, “I shall go to Fernanda immediately, and I have no doubt but that I shall reconcile her to the concession which you have induced her to make. Now, be wise yourself, and allude with no one whomsoever to this transaction, unless it should become absolutely requisite, which I trust will never be the case.”

Montalto assured Doña Inez that he was as fully impressed as she could possibly desire, with the necessity of the greatest discretion; and, having thanked her most earnestly and most respectfully for her invaluable assistance and advice, he withdrew, and she proceeded to find Fernanda.

Great was the surprise of the latter when informed of the object of the Vice-queen's visit, and many and bitter were the animadversions she poured forth upon what she conceived

to be Montalto's most unbecoming conduct, in reporting to a third party that which had occurred between them. The Duchess had too much experience in similar matters, to attempt any expostulation until the first burst of her young companion's resentment was fully spent. She then entered freely and seriously into the whole subject with her,—urged fully upon her all the perils of her present situation,—all the advantages that her union with Montalto would present, all the depth and sincerity of his passion for her; and finally, after a very long interview, she withdrew, not without an apparently well-founded hope that she had restored her protégée to a fair perception of her real interests and duty.

## CHAPTER VI.

WE should here pause for a moment, and endeavour to determine what was the true and mutual state of mind of the young lovers, whose history we have thus retraced to this period, the most critical of their courtship. Those of Montalto may have been easily ascertained from what has preceded. His devotion to his mistress was deep, ardent, and unmingled. He fearlessly confided his whole destiny to the impetuous course of his passion, without one momentary pang of doubt or of hesitation; and if, on one single occasion—the day upon which he had witnessed the fate of Isabel—a painful misgiving had crossed his mind as to

the real sympathy which might exist between Fernanda's disposition and his own, that transient impression had been overcome, for the present at least, by the increased testimonies of her regard, which his mistress had subsequently, and consequently perhaps, bestowed upon him.

As to the fair Marquesa, though it will have been evident to the reader that Montalto's addresses were no longer received by her with the disdain or indifference which she had at first manifested, her feelings were still both more complex and more completely under her control than might, perhaps, have been conjectured from her conduct. It is but fair to her, to state, that the latter was not entirely guided by caprice or by impulse, and that a serious and very severe conflict was then engaged between her inclinations and her judgment.

When this eventful year had opened before her, Fernanda, as we have already seen, was in the full and unqualified enjoyment of every blessing that this world could afford to a woman whose heart was free. Nothing was

then further from her thoughts than the sacrifice of that liberty which she had so fervently longed for, and could so ardently appreciate; and when she had wagered, with the Princess Colonna, her costliest pearl necklace, that during that forthcoming year, no change would take place in her present condition, she would have as confidently ventured upon the same stake the whole of her fortune. Such was still her real frame of mind during the conversation with Montalto, at the Governor's festa, which we have previously recorded. It is true, that the impassioned terms in which, on that night, her lover had conveyed to her his sentiments, had, for the first time, produced a somewhat lasting impression upon her; but even this would have gradually given way to her former determination, had not Montalto's resolution to proceed to Sicily awakened in her mind an unknown but intense feeling of apprehension and regret.

It has been said, that despair is sometimes the safest counsellor, and it certainly proved itself to be so in that instance. It is pro-

bable, that no combination that the greatest ingenuity, or the most consummate experience, might have suggested, could have exercised a happier influence over the fortunes of the Principe's love, than the reckless scheme to which the severity of his mistress had then impelled him. In that hour, not only did the Marquesa irretrievably commit herself, both to her lover and to the Duchess, but the charm of her self-confidence was broken, and doubt and perplexity became the unbidden inmates of her breast. Since then, every incident that had occurred had been eminently favourable to Montalto's prospects, until the unhopèd-for rapidity with which the tide of his success had borne him along, startled, in its turn, Fernanda, and awakened her to the consciousness of her altered position. She then became fully aware that the climacteric period of her life was at hand, and determined upon summoning all the latent energies of her nature, to regain, ere it was too late, the entire freedom of her judgment.

Thus, when Montalto, not unnaturally, presumed that the interval claimed by his

mistress for mature reflection, was but the last term of her abandoned resistance, and the inevitable prelude to a definitive surrender, she was resolving, most conscientiously, to employ that time in giving every diversion to the sentiments that had lately appeared to predominate within her, in accurately testing their real power, and in strenuously struggling with them for the mastery. Hence arose, between the two lovers, an original misunderstanding as to their relative positions, which, in the excited state of their over-wrought feelings, and by a combination of untoward circumstances, was to lead, as we shall see, to the most unlooked-for and afflicting though not unusual consequences.

The first step taken by Fernanda, in her new system of self-defence, was to avoid all private interviews with Montalto, and to admit to a greater degree of intimacy and confidence than before, Don Luis de la Cerda, who, as we have already seen, was both her countryman and her relation. He was a singular person, this Don Luis, and one whose appearance was rarely forgotten by any of

those who had ever gazed upon him. His figure was commanding, his strength herculean, and his face would have been reckoned handsome, had it not been for the extreme sternness of expression which had characterized it, even in early youth, and before a deep sword-cut across the forehead had added to the sinister and forbidding cast of the whole countenance. Fearless in action, relentless in victory, undaunted in defeat, and as sagacious and firm at the council-table as on the battle-field, Don Luis might have been reckoned a fair type of that imperious and highly-gifted race, which then held under its dominion so considerable a portion of the known world. He had never been married; yet, though his disposition allured him rather to the camp than to the court, strange tales were told of the fierce spirit with which he had engaged in many of the gallantries of the day, and of the violent deeds of revenge and of jealousy attributed to the dark-browed suitor. He had come over to Palermo with the late Viceroy, who had entrusted him with the command of the Spanish troops; but

having lately been superseded in that office, he was now remaining, apparently, in the mere expectation of a favourable opportunity for returning to his native land. This was the personage whom Fernanda now determined to receive, for a time, as her accredited cavalier, some companion of this description being absolutely and almost hourly required, in her present unprotected state. Don Luis thus became a constant attendant upon his fair kinswoman, who, as some of her detractors affirmed, was, perchance, nothing loath, besides, to display, in the capacity of a most subdued lover, him whom few would look upon without a secret feeling of awe.

It may well be supposed, that Montalto was not the last to observe this change in his mistress's demeanour towards her stern countryman, and he was not long in expostulating with her upon the subject, the more so, that he had recently enjoyed himself some of the privileges now bestowed upon Don Luis. Fernanda seized the opportunity, thus not unexpectedly offered, distinctly to repeat to her Sicilian suitor, that her intention, during the allotted

period, was rather to shun than to seek his society, for many reasons, amongst which, she would merely point out that of putting a stop, for the present at least, to the surmises and conjectures which the attentions she had recently and so manifestedly received from him, had prematurely accredited, very much to her annoyance, throughout the whole court.

This explanation was scarcely more satisfactory to Montalto's mind than his previous misgivings; but as Fernanda adhered inflexibly to her resolution, he saw no alternative than to have again recourse to the friendly counsels and experience of the Vice-queen. The Duchess, after attentively entering into every detail of the case, recommended her protégé to show his respect for his mistress's judgment by following her example, and by bestowing, in his turn, upon the Princess Colonna, or some other rival beauty, the public attentions at present rejected by the over-cautious Fernanda.

Now, with all due deference to the opinions of the sagacious Duquesa, we venture to doubt

whether this latter advice showed as accurate a knowledge of the peculiar character of the haughty and capricious Marquesa di Sierra Hermosa, as of the general disposition attributed to her sex. In many—perhaps in most cases, a suitor situated as Montalto then was, might doubtless have succeeded in recalling, by some symptoms of indifference or of rebellion, the wavering affections of his mistress. But we must not forget that, as the determined and ardent devotedness of her lover had alone shaken the firm resolve of Fernanda's mind, as the conflicting doubts which now assailed her had principally arisen from a misgiving respecting the constancy and docility of those impassioned sentiments, the line of conduct now suggested to Montalto was of a nature both to confirm these doubts, and to impair the favourable impression with which they were contending. So, unfortunately, the result proved.

During the first fortnight of the appointed period of probation, Fernanda scrupulously adhered to her determination, and never once, whether in her own house or elsewhere, did

her luckless lover succeed in finding her alone; while, as if by some strange and fatal coincidence, Don Luis was ever at her side, and appeared to be in continual conference with her, upon matters relating to her fortune and interests in Spain. On the other hand, never had the Princess Colonna been more gracious, nor seemingly in more continual need of a cavalier. Thus was Montalto gradually led on, against his own secret inclinations, to follow the perilous counsels of Doña Inez; and thus, day by day, and almost imperceptibly, feelings of estrangement and irritation were mutually awakened between those whose hearts had lately appeared so truly and so tenderly united.

As is not unusual in similar occurrences, Fernanda, without remembering how seriously her present conduct was calculated to wound and to alienate her lover, gave way to many internal but bitter animadversions upon the slight amount of deference and devotedness which he now evinced; while Montalto himself, entirely overlooking the many grounds which might be adduced for the temporary

change in his mistress's demeanour towards him, fostered, with the recklessness of a child, the resentment and jealousy which it had aroused within him. Still, on neither side, perchance, would these feelings have been expressed, had not a peculiar circumstance led the young lovers indirectly to allude to them.

In happier days, Fernanda had more than once remonstrated with Montalto upon his too assiduous attendance at the gaming-tables, where, according to the fatal propensity of the age, the fortunes of the more youthful cavaliers were almost nightly staked. To this vice, the Marquesa de Sierra Hermosa had a sincere and inveterate abhorrence, proceeding mostly from the fact, that Don Guzman had himself been a great gambler, and had thus considerably excited, as she conceived, all the more malignant passions of his disposition. Latterly, and while his addresses had been more favourably received, Montalto seemed, in accordance with the pressing advice of his mistress, to have completely renounced this evil practice; but now, whether from the effects of his recent disappointments, or perhaps from the necessity

of recruiting his present resources, which had been sorely impaired by his late purchases from Spinosa, he was again as constant an attendant at the dice and hazard tables, as any of his cotemporaries. This, Fernanda had not failed to observe, with sentiments in which her sincere regret was not unmingled with wounded self-love, and she could not resist imparting the former of these sentiments to her lover, on the first occasion that offered.

"I hear of nothing but your gains, Signor," said she to him, one morning, as they were accidentally thrown together at a levee held by the Viceroy. It was the only opportunity they had had of conversing alone together, since the day when he had taken such violent possession of her ring.

"Now is my time, fair lady," replied he, "for trying my fortunes at the gaming-table."

"Why so, may I ask? because you know that it displeases and grieves your true friends?"

"No, indeed, Signora; but you may have already heard, that we poor cavaliers reckon that we are lucky at cards when we are unfortunate elsewhere."

“And have you had reason lately to complain of the Principessa di Colonna’s severity?” said the Marquesa.

“No, Signora. But her smiles are like those ominous sunbeams which appear in the sky when it is most overcast, and which herald naught but the storm.”

“Indeed! yet you have lately seemed to bask in them as never boys on the Chiaia revelled in the brightest rays of the meridian.”

“Nay, Fernanda, my sun is not there, as you well know. But we cannot live without the light of love, and must fain seek for it, even at the commonest torch, when the glorious day-star we worship is withdrawn from us.”

“That is poor devotion, Signor, and one which may well justify any doubts respecting the faith itself.”

“Doubts! fair lady. They are the base, noxious weeds which will ever spring up around the fairest produce of nature. Sceptics may be found who will doubt the faith of the blessed martyrs themselves; but let us not join their accursed ranks.”

“No, in truth, Signor. But still there have

been false prophets, and imaginary martyrs, and how shall we distinguish between these impostors and their holy forerunners?"

"I know not, indeed, fair lady, except we call the heart to the assistance of the mind."

"And pray, is not the heart itself sometimes betrayed and deceived?"

Montalto was on the point of replying, when the approach of Don Luis, who had been detained, much against his inclination, by the Governor, interrupted the conversation.

"I think you told me, Signora," said he, "that you would allow me to re-conduct you to-day to your palace."

"I did; is it already time to retire?"

"Yes, Signora, I see every one preparing to withdraw."

"Very well; then farewell, Principe," rejoined Fernanda; "I have still something to say to you, but I suppose we shall meet at Antonia's to-night."

How often does it occur, when mistrust and resentment have sprung up between hearts that are truly attached, and when the noxious feelings have been fostered by estrangement or

by absence, that one short interview, one word, one look, may suffice entirely to remove and to eradicate the fatal growth. It was thus in this case. No sooner did Montalto again behold the playful smile of his mistress, no sooner did she herself see his ardent gaze fixed upon her as of yore, than all sense of mutual injury vanished on either side; and when they again met that evening at the Princess Colonna's, no symptoms of the reciprocal embarrassment and constraint which had lately chilled and well-nigh interrupted their intercourse, were perceptible. Instinctively warned that his approach would not be unwelcome, Montalto hastened to join the Marquesa, when he first beheld her, and so skilfully was the conversation conducted on either side, that they were soon alone together.

"How beautiful is that rose that you wear in your doublet," said Fernanda; "how do you manage always to have the loveliest flowers of Palermo?"

"They come from Montalto," answered he, "where my respected aunt has a Genoese gardener, who, I believe, is a great proficient in

his art. You shall have as many as you can desire, and this one, of course, if you will condescend to accept it."

"Perhaps I will," answered Fernanda, "if I may consider it as an earnest that you really mean to renounce that odious vice, which I had hoped you had abandoned."

"Fernanda," replied Montalto, sadly, "if I have been reckless and desperate, of late, I think you must know the cause."

"That is no excuse at all," retorted she; "there never was a time, I should say, when you were more bound not to act in defiance of my wishes."

"Alas! what would be my reward, now, if I complied with them? I hear every one say, that your journey to Spain with Don Luis is determined upon."

"Not exactly that," replied she. "Of course, I mention it as a probable contingency, to avoid the appearance of any sudden and precipitate decision, should I be obliged to go; but, as I have promised you, my resolution will be entirely suspended for one month more. Ah, here comes Antonia, of course!

"I shall not go in the morning, but I shall go to see the house in the afternoon."

The time, however, the Princess Colman's grace was nearly to conduct Marston to the Vice-queen, who had desired to speak with him, and she immediately returned to Fernando's side, who, in the meanwhile, had been talking to Jan Luis.

"Listen now, that is a beautiful and precious jewel you have there," said Antonio, almost gasping at the lower emerald.

"Beautiful it is," said Fernando, rather scornfully: "but precious it can scarcely be called, as I question whether it would be worth more than a trinket in the market."

"Ay, but it may have a relative value in the drawing-room, which it has not in the street. What say you, Don Luis,—precious and beautiful, or merely beautiful?"

"It certainly will be precious in the eyes of any one upon whom the Marquess might deign to bestow it," was the reply.

"Do not set your heart upon having it," Signor said the Princess: "for it is one of

those worthless trifles with which we ladies never part."

"Indeed!" retorted the Marquesa, rather annoyed at the continued persecution of her friend. "Will you exchange your diamond pin against it?"

"Certainly, most joyfully," exclaimed Antonia; "on condition, however, that I may offer my prize to Don Luis, who, I believe, will value it still more than I can."

Fernanda was now about to reply in the negative, when she beheld, to her inexpressible regret, that, even in the midst of his conversation with the Duquesa, at the other end of the room, Montalto's eyes were fixed upon them, and anxiously contemplating the whole transaction. A moment's confusion ensued, during which the impetuous Antonia abruptly seized upon the flower, transferred it to Don Luis, and replaced it by the forfeited jewel. Nothing, therefore, remained for Fernanda, but to vow that she would, in her turn, present Montalto with the diamond pin, which, in fact, was, more properly speaking, his.

But, alas! while he was in entire ignorance of these friendly intentions of his sportive mistress, the young Principe had but too accurately beheld the ostensible portion of the arrangement.

"Heartless, faithless *ventanera*!" muttered he, in a fresh paroxysm of jealousy and resentment; "accursed is he that trusts to thy fickle smile! But it is time that I should show thee that my heart is not thus to be trifled with." And, within five minutes, almost under her eyes, he was seated again with his usual associates at the dice-table.

High were the stakes, and deep the play; but, still, Fortune herself seemed to guide Montalto's hand, and the ransom of a prince was lying accumulated before him, when a message from Fernanda warned him that she was about to retire, and that she was expecting him.

"Tell the Marquesa," answered he, coldly, "that I am engaged here, and cannot wait upon her to-night."

The smile which was already playing upon Fernanda's lips, at the thoughts of the sur-

prise and gratification with which her lover would receive the diamond pin she was treasuring for him, gave way to an expression of the deepest astonishment, when his most unforeseen answer was delivered to her. The frown did not, however, long sit upon her brow, and, fearing that some misunderstanding might have arisen, she moved herself to the table where he was sitting, and softly whispered—

“ Now, Signor Cavaliere, when you are ready, I am.”

At the sound of that voice, Montalto's heart sank within him, but still he mustered resolution enough to arise, and to reply—

“ I trust, Signora, that you will dispense with my attendance to-night, as I am bound not to retire without affording one more chance to my opponents here.”

Fernanda's very eyes grew pale with anger and amazement at this answer; yet, though the whole pride of her being swelled her heart, she thought it more prudent to retire, without noticing any further for the present the deliberate insult she had received.

Montalto earnestly gazed upon her as, with a matchless dignity and grace, she withdrew from the room; and then, oh, how wild was the tumult of regret, of remorse, and of self-reproach, which arose within his breast. Springing up hastily from the table, he would have rushed after the adored being, whose proffered affection he had thus, for the first time, repelled; but the Duquesa was already at his side, and claimed his hand as far as her palace.

For once he felt most strongly disinclined to communicate with her upon what had occurred; but the practised eye of Doña Inez had well discerned a considerable portion of the incidents of the evening, and she was not long in wringing from her bewildered companion an utter and complete confession of the whole.

Great was Montalto's astonishment, and greater still his satisfaction, when the Duchess informed him that his conduct, far from being, as he had conceived, not only reprehensible but disgraceful, was, in her estimation, both well calculated, and entirely justified.

"You could not, you ought not to have

acted otherwise," said she, in conclusion; "now, do not spoil all by proffering any apology, when none is owing, or can be required. Remember that we women are as your shadows—when you pursue us, we appear to fly from you—when you fly, we pursue you in our turn. Have courage to wait until Fernanda's own good sense will have shown her how much she has been to blame, and then you will be secured, I trust, from a recurrence of these most annoying provocations."

Alas! how often is the generous heart of youth misled, when it trusts to the counsels of experience, rather than to its own native impulse.

Had Montalto, on the ensuing morning, followed his own anxious and unbidden desire, he would have rushed to Fernanda's feet; and how soon there would all have been forgiven and forgotten! But as yet, alas, each successive incident had fully justified the sagacity of Doña Inez's counsels; he determined to abide by them in this one instance more, and thus all was lost.

During three whole days, the Marquesa

anxiously, but most resolutely, awaited the tokens of contrition and regret, which she not unnaturally believed her lover would not fail to convey to her; but, on the third day, which, as ill fate would have it, immediately preceded that on which the long-expected tournament was to be held, no message whatever having reached her from Montalto, her last resolve was definitively taken.

"Of course," said she to Don Luis, while alone with him for a few minutes, at her own house, "of course you will appear in the lists to-morrow?"

"No, Señora."

"Indeed! that is very singular."

"I had originally intended to take my part in the contest, but as the Viceroy seemed to prefer that I should this time remain a mere spectator, I have willingly given way to some of my juniors."

"I wonder what can have been the Governor's motive."

"Simply, I should think, to ensure to the Sicilians a greater chance of success, and there-

by to keep them in better humour, according to his adopted policy."

"But should you conceive yourself bound not to appear, if you were requested to bear the colours of some poor forlorn dame who has lost her cavalier, or has, perchance never had one."

"Most certainly not, fair cousin, were such a one to require my services."

"And how is she to solicit the honour?"

"Solicit, Señora! She has merely to express her wish."

"Indeed! Then, in plain Spanish, fair Señor, will you be my true knight to-morrow, and bear to victory the blue and white colours of Sierra Hermosa?"

The Señor de la Cerda fixed his dark eyes upon his companion, in deep surprise, and said—

"Surely, Doña Fernanda, you are talking in jest, and the unspeakable honour of bearing those glorious colours must already have been conferred upon some one."

Fernanda's look quailed under the ardent

and interrogating gaze of her companion, as she answered—

“To you alone do I entrust them; you alone will have a right to wear them; and should they be assumed by any other, you may safely affirm that he does so upon his own sole authority.”

“And at his own peril, too,” said Don Luis, “if any one should venture thus to trifle with you.”

“Nay, but Signor,” interposed Fernanda, “it is for a courteous passage of arms, of course, that my colours are committed to you, and not for a hostile affray; so that, in no case, is a lance or a sword to be crossed in my name, except in chivalrous sport; remember that.”

Don Luis bowed deeply, and the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of a third party.

No sooner was she again alone, than more than one misgiving forced itself upon Fernanda’s mind, as to the prudence of the step which she had just taken. Was she indeed free still to dispose of her colours? Had not she given Montalto a fair title to conceive that he was

himself fully authorized to bear them? And, though in words she had surely desired him, on a former occasion, to carry her scarf to the Señor de la Cerda, had not a very different interpretation been conveyed in her looks, and received by her lover? These doubts and reflections, the Marquesa could not wholly dispel. But then, on the other hand, Montalto, since that day, had never mentioned the subject to her, never once claimed or solicited any more explicit expression of her wishes, or confirmation of his own hopes. Doubtless, also, his pride, which deterred him from bearing to her feet the apology she had a right to require for his late conduct, would equally forbid his appearing in public as the accredited cavalier of a woman whom he had not hesitated so unscrupulously to offend, and almost to insult. The still incensed Fernanda reasoned with her conscience, and, though more than once, she was on the point of writing to Don Luis, to reclaim her pledge, her resentment finally prevailed, and no further communication was received by him from his wayward country-woman.

In the meantime, where was Montalto? Had it not been for the approaching tournament, no human power would have withheld him for so long from flying to Fernanda's feet, and humbly requesting her forgiveness. But the thought that an opportunity was so near at hand, when he might testify openly, and before the whole Court, his unshaken devotedness to his lady-love, — the hope that ere another sun was set, he would have laid at her feet the well-earned crown of victory and of beauty, induced him still to adhere to the sterner counsels of the Vice-queen.

"But thou, at least, art mine!" would he exclaim, pressing the treasured scarf to his lips, as he reclined upon his divan. "Her eyes and her voice gave thee to me, even while her sportive words seemed to bestow thee upon another. But thine shall be the glorious palm of to-morrow: the best lance in Sicily will not fail in my grasp for such a cause, and Santa Maria di Carmen will again smile upon the true knight who has vowed a nobler candlestick to her altar than it has ever been decked with as yet, if the prize be awarded to him."

## CHAPTER VII.

ON the following day the sun rose with more than its usual splendour, and seldom have its morning beams fallen upon a gayer or more glittering assemblage than that which then thronged the lists of Palermo. For the approaching martial display, a considerable extent of ground in the immediate neighbourhood of the city had been enclosed by strong barriers, round which temporary galleries had been raised for the accommodation of the spectators. At either extremity of the circular, or rather, oval, space thus reserved for the tournament, the lists were left open; and at each portal a gallant array of trumpeters, of

poursuivants, and of heralds, were in waiting, to maintain good order, and to secure the strict observance of all the regulations laid down by the marshals of the field. At the northern of these extremities were planted the standards and shields of the six challengers, all of them Sicilians, illustrious by their birth, their exploits, or their renown in feats of arms; and though of these knights Montalto was the youngest, none created higher expectations of triumph among the gay multitude, whose sympathies were clearly engaged in the cause of their national chivalry. Behind these standards, and immediately without the neighbouring portals, several large tents had been erected for the accommodation of the challengers, their horses, their retainers, and all the minor officials whose services they might require. At the southern extremity stood one single flag-staff, upon which floated the colours of Spain, marking that the assailants would be exclusively of that nation; and the large tents which had also been raised for their use, though less costly than those of their opponents, were not less sumptuously

provided with everything that the courteous combatants might desire.

In the very centre of the lists, on either side, and opposite the spot where it was most probable that the antagonists would meet, a considerable portion of the public galleries was reserved and enclosed, like the principal stands on a modern race-course, so as to ensure a greater amount of ease and privacy to the occupants. The most gorgeous tapestries, flags, and emblematical designs, profusely decorated both these spaces; the one being intended for the Viceroy, his retinue, and the principal personages of his court; the other for the fair lady to whom the crown of love and beauty would be assigned by the victorious knight. Although all the leading members of the Sicilian nobility had been invited by the Vice-queen to attend upon her, on that day, it is not to be supposed that the public galleries were deserted or poorly occupied. The provincial squire, the wealthy merchant, the substantial burgess, the dark-visaged Jew,—all were present, each conducting some fair relative, dressed in all the pomp

of her holiday attire, and certainly not less eager than any of her sterner companions, to witness the exploits of the champions, and to decide upon their respective merits. Nor was a considerable number of the neighbouring peasantry wanting, whose varied and picturesque costume contributed not a little to enliven and to complete the general effect of the brilliant and animated scene.

No sooner had the Viceroy and his splendid retinue occupied, amidst the deafening cheers of the spectators, the seats reserved for them, than the two marshals of the lists, each in the full accoutrements of his office, and mounted on noble and richly caparisoned steeds, approached, and received his orders to give the signal for the commencement of the tourney. This signal was immediately echoed forth by all the trumpets stationed at each extremity of the lists; and the marshals having parted, to take up their respective stations in the centre of the ring, the space between the portals was cleared on either side, and the six challengers in full armour rode into the lists, while the shrill notes of their clarions proclaimed their proud and uni-

versal defiance. The martial sounds were immediately responded to from the opposite quarter, and six gallant Spanish cavaliers forthwith occupied the corresponding ground allotted to the assailants. An interval of a few minutes was allowed, that the antagonists might more fully prepare for the encounter, and that the spectators might examine in detail the appearance, the armour, and the gallant steeds, of the rival candidates for fame. The soul-stirring "*Laissez aller*" was then blazoned forth by the clarions of the *poursuivants*; the knights dashed forward at the full speed of their horses, and they met, with one terrific shock, in the centre of the arena. Loud was the cry of exultation which burst from the assembled crowds, when the result was ascertained, for the fortunes of Sicily were triumphant. While none of the challengers appeared to have suffered in any way by this first passage of arms, two of the assailants were unhorsed, and a third having lost his stirrups, was declared by the marshals to be among the vanquished.

"Do you know who my antagonist was?" said Montalto to his equerry, when he had

regained his station at the extremity of the lists.

"I do not, my lord," answered the latter; "but I cannot say much for his seat on horseback. Your highness's lance actually bore him out of the saddle."

"Just see if my girths are firm, and if the bit is straight in Mohammed's mouth," continued the young Prince, preparing for a fresh onslaught. "But tell me, Andrea, can you distinguish what colours that knight is wearing, who appears to be now taking up his station opposite to me?"

"I should say they were blue and white, Sir, as far as I can discern."

"Ah, Santa Maria, so they are indeed, and this must be cleared up. Just send a page over, with my respects to him, and ask him if he has any objection to say who he is, and whose colours he is bearing."

At the end of a few minutes, the youthful attendant returned, and informed his lord that the person whom he had addressed was Don Luis de la Cerda, carrying the colours of the Marquesa di Sierra Hermosa.

So great was the astonishment of the gallant Sicilian that, for a few seconds, he was actually unable to make any reply; at length, in the calmest tone that he could assume, he desired his page to return, and inquire of his opponent whether he had the Marquesa's distinct authority for thus appearing in public with her badge. When the page returned, the message he bore was, that Don Luis had been, on the very day before, entrusted by Doña Fernanda with the honour of wearing her colours, and desired by her to proclaim them falsely and traitorously assumed by whomsoever else might venture to appear in them.

"Santa Rosalia! said he so indeed?" replied the infuriated Montalto; and tearing from his shoulder the scarf of his faithless mistress, he cast it under the very feet of his impatient war-horse.

When the restless animal had more than once trampled upon the discarded love-token, "Here, Andrea," said Montalto, "take up that thing, tie it round the waist of my youngest page there, and let him wear it until sunset."

It is not to be supposed that, in an assem-

blage so numerous, so well versed in all the fantastic rules and customs of chivalry, and so intently bent upon scrutinizing all the incidents of the hour, this occurrence could have remained entirely unnoticed. Though, at first, the real import of the transaction was, of course, but imperfectly gathered by the spectators, a rumour soon arose, that some great and most unusual insult had been offered to a lady of the court; and the low whisperings of curiosity soon swelled into a general murmur of surprise and disapprobation.

“Had not we better sound the *Laissez aller*?” said the Viceroy to the senior marshal of the field, seated on horseback immediately beneath him. “Our friends appear to be growing clamorous for the progress of the entertainment.”

The marshal bowed, the signal was given, and thus, of the vice-regal cortège, two persons only were, in the first moment, apprized of what had just occurred on the challenger’s ground. Perhaps we need not say, that these two persons were the Princess Colonna and Doña Fernanda herself.

While the latter remained speechless, and breathless with indignation, "I think we had better both retire, my dear," was the consolatory advice of the former; "for such an insult to us all is quite insufferable."

"You may pause, perhaps, until you have seen my reply," said Fernanda, endeavouring, with a strong effort, to subdue, or at least to conceal, the feelings that swelled her bosom. 'Mark! it is even now at hand!'

Hardly were these words uttered, when the challengers and assailants again met, amidst a cloud of dust, and four knights were hurled to the ground.

"Ah, Caramba!" cried the Viceroy; "can that be Montalto who is unhorsed? I should have thought that none here, saving La Cerda, could have accomplished that feat; and he was to take no part in the tournament. Santa Maria! What are they attempting now? Surely, the marshals cannot countenance that!"

The proceedings to which these observations referred, were, indeed, highly irregular. Though Montalto had been borne to the

ground with great force by the unrivalled lance and Herculean strength of the gigantic Spaniard, he was, in a few seconds, standing by him, on foot, sword in hand, and defying him to immediate and mortal combat. The challenge had been accepted, as soon as heard; but ere the hostile weapons had fairly crossed, the marshals and their poursuivants were on the spot, the encounter peremptorily interrupted, and both the combatants placed under arrest, by an authority which neither could question, nor resist.

"We shall meet again, I trust," cried Montalto, "where none will be present to part us."

"As soon as you please, wherever you please, and as often as you please," was the haughty Spaniard's reply.

Each champion then withdrew from the scene of the forbidden combat, and the loud and repeated cheers which greeted the victory of Don Luis, added not a little to the feelings of mortification and of revenge that burned in the heart of Montalto, as he retired from the fatal lists.

When the next "Laissez aller" was sounded, three knights only appeared on the side of the assailants; but, now, fortune smiled no longer upon the challengers; each, in his turn, succumbed to the unerring lance of La Cerda, who was finally proclaimed the victor of the day. At whose feet the crown of beauty was laid, we need not say: but, alas! how heavily that slight golden circlet sat upon the brow of Fernanda; and how eagerly did she sigh for the conclusion of the glittering pageant, in which she now was to bear so prominent, but so unwilling a part.

The tedious ceremonials were, at length, brought to their close, and the soul-weary queen was allowed to retire to the welcome privacy of her innermost apartment. Scarcely, however, had she been two hours there, sadly brooding over the events of the day, and upon their inevitable consequences, when she was told that the Vice-queen had called to see her, and she was constrained to go forth to meet her.

"I have come to you, mi querida," said the Duchess, "to offer what assistance I can, in

this most unfortunate affair, of which I have just been informed, and which, I hear, is already the talk of the whole town. Now, do tell me what I shall say as to your share in the matter?"

"Say, madam?" replied Fernanda, whose affection and respect for the Vice-queen hardly overcame her impatience at being thus so early and so pressingly interrogated. "If people must needs converse upon a subject which can in no way concern them, perhaps your highness will kindly refer them to the mere facts of the case, which appear to me to be, that an unprotected woman has been shamefully offended, and nobly avenged."

"To be sure, my dear; but no one here will think that the Principe di Montalto, the most courteous knight in all Sicily, could have been induced to have acted as he has done to-day, had not some provocation been given to him, or had not, at least, some misunderstanding occurred."

"I protest," replied Fernanda, "that I neither can be, nor wish to be, in any way

responsible or accountable for the Principe di Montalto's conduct. Perhaps your highness had better apply to him, for any justification which it may seem to you to require, unless you yourself approve of it."

"Nay, my dear," answered the Duchess, "you really should not turn so fiercely upon your friends, while they are endeavouring to assist you in a matter, more serious, perhaps, than you think. Montalto certainly appeared in your colours, and has already informed his friends, as I am told, that he was perfectly justified in so doing. This statement must be absolutely contradicted, or your own conduct will remain liable to censure, or at least to criticism. How came he to have in his possession your own scarf?"

"That I shall be able most authentically, and most indisputably, to explain to your highness," replied Fernanda; and, clapping her hands, she summoned from her dressing-room the tire-woman who was in attendance there.

"Go immediately," said she to her, "and tell Rosetta to come to me."

"Not since?"

"No, madam."

"What has the  
white scarf white  
ing?"

"The blue as  
your highness has  
given it to the F

"Exactly. Y

"I was, madam."

"Can you dis  
to him?"

"Yes, madam."

"What was it?"

"Your highness  
bears the scarf to I  
you."

"And what did

"Have I ever mentioned this matter to you  
nce."

"No, madam."

"Very well! You may retire, and take care  
at you remain perfectly silent upon this sub-  
t, as well as upon every other in which my  
me may be concerned."

"And now, madam," exclaimed Fernanda,  
then again alone with the Vice-queen, "I so-  
nly protest and affirm, upon this small but  
red crucifix—sacred indeed, for it was blessed  
the Holy Father himself—that what you  
ve just heard is the truth, the whole and  
tire truth, in this matter. If any misunder-  
nding has occurred, I cannot, and will not,  
responsible for it, as I have been no party  
it."

These earnest asseverations could not but  
ing conviction to the mind of the Duchess.

"I have no doubt," replied she, "that all  
u say is perfectly true. The whole must  
ve been the result of some misunderstanding,  
uch time will clear up. I must leave you  
w, but we shall meet again this evening at  
a banquet, where your Majesty is to preside."

“Your Grace will excuse me, if I request your permission not to appear again in public, to-day. I am much fatigued and distressed by this morning’s events, and am really unequal to any further exertion.”

“Nonsense, querida, I cannot hear of any such desertion. It is absolutely necessary that you should come this evening. Remember what I say—it is absolutely necessary, otherwise no one can answer for the construction which the whole court will, most naturally, put upon your absence.”

Fernanda could not but be struck by the force of these observations. She promised the Vice-queen that she would use her utmost endeavours to recover her fortitude, and in this effort she succeeded. The banquet was graced by the presence of the Queen of Love, her beauty heightened to more than its usual splendour, both by the magnificence of her attire, and by the conflicting emotions which pressed in wild succession on her heart; but, alas! how little cause had they, who gazed with a jealous eye on that diadem which the most valiant arm of Palermo had so nobly

earned, and so fittingly bestowed,—how little cause had they to envy the secret feelings of the lovely and triumphant Sovereign.

In the meantime, where was Montalto? Perhaps it was fortunate for him, that some serious injuries received in the affray brought that diversion, which bodily pain will often cause to the tortures of a wounded spirit. Alarmed by the fevered state of his frame, upon his return to his palace, his faithful equerry had sent for a surgeon, who, having immediately bled the patient, prescribed, in the most peremptory manner, rest and complete seclusion. Thus, it was not until the third day after the fatal tourney, that the Principe's friends were admitted to visit him.

These being principally young cavaliers, such as himself, scarcely more guarded in their language than reserved in their conduct, the unfortunate Montalto was soon informed, in no very measured terms, of the many most unfavourable reports which were circulating throughout the court, with respect to himself. His astonishment equalled his indignation, when he learned that he was publicly and

generally accused of having assumed, without any authority from her, the colours which Doña Fernanda had requested him to bear to a third party; of having subsequently insulted her without any provocation on her part; and that this version was accredited and corroborated by the injured Marquessa herself. This was more than Montalto could endure, in the present excited state of his mind; and it is not very surprising that, in answer to these serious charges, he should have entered, with some detail, into the circumstances which had led him, very sincerely to conceive that he was authorized to appear at the tournament as Doña Fernanda's chosen knight. We will not attempt entirely to exculpate him for this indiscretion, the less so, that he was actually betrayed by the fervour of the moment into showing, to more than one of his companions, the ring of his faithless mistress, and the very singular device inscribed upon it. Perhaps, after all, his youth and inexperience are the best excuses which we could plead in his favour. At all events, he then learned, that in matters which should remain secret, we are responsible, not only for

the communications which we make, but for the parties to whom they are made, and for the probable amount of exaggeration with which they will be adorned and propagated.

Scarcely had twenty-four hours elapsed, when his imprudent friends, in their own zealous efforts fully to vindicate the character of their companion, had declared to almost every member of the court, that Montalto had the highest, the clearest, the most unimpeachable title for appearing in the lists with the Marquesa's scarf, and that he had the most indisputable tokens to produce, in proof of all that they affirmed, and of even more than they were willing to state.

These manifold and repeated assertions produced a complete revulsion in the opinions of the court; and soon the haughty Fernanda was warned, by the altered bearing of her usual associates towards her, as well as by the suggestions of those obliging informants, who, in similar circumstances, are never far away, that her own conduct was now most seriously questioned and impeached. Again the officious and goodnatured Duchess called upon her; but she unfortunately appeared at a moment

when the Marquessa's impatience and resentment had been more than usually excited by a friendly communication she had just received from Annala recommending her retirement from Palermo for a short time. Thus the Vice-queen was welcomed with less courtesy and deference than she indisputably had a right to expect and after a long and most unsatisfactory discussion, she finally took leave of her unwanted companion, in such terms as to preclude any further intercourse between them for the present.

It is to remark that when thus deprived of her experienced counsellor, the headstrong Elizabeth had not so completely lost her self-control as to follow the wild impulse which would have led her to claim the assistance of Don Luis in her present emergency, and thus to draw the most extreme and awful consequences which the untoward occurrence could have produced. Still, though she had common sense enough left not to call for that serious and probably fatal intervention, it was not in her nature quietly to rest under the aspersions now so fully cast upon her

by a considerable portion of the court; and seizing upon her pen, in the impassioned vehemence of the hour, she addressed Montalto to the following effect:—

“ I had hoped that the well-deserved chastisement which so closely followed upon the unprovoked insult that you ventured to offer to me, and the loud and general applause with which that fitting retribution was hailed, might have induced you to abstain from offending, any farther, one whose only wish is to be considered henceforth, by you, as a perfect stranger. I find, however, that I am again mistaken, and that you now attempt to justify your own unpardonable conduct by the basest and the falsest insinuations against me. That I have a champion both able and willing to vindicate my honour, you have already ascertained; and I trust, that from motives of prudence alone, if from no other, you will spare me the painful necessity of soliciting his assistance, to obtain what I am so well entitled to require. If you are not grown entirely insensible to every consideration of chivalrous duty, and of self-respect, you will

immediately restore to me the ring, which, as you well know, you have in your possession contrary to my wishes; and you will authoritatively put an end to the infamous calumnies which, doubtless at your instigation, your friends are pleased to circulate with respect to me."

Fully to appreciate the feelings which swelled the heart of Montalto, upon perusing this most unexpected communication, we must remember, that in this unfortunate difference, as in many others, not only was either party somewhat justified in considering itself injured, but that each had lately, from an unfortunate concurrence of circumstances, remained in partial ignorance of the views and conduct of the other, and had thus had much fatal leisure to brood over its own grievances. It is not, therefore, very surprising, that the answer of the enraged Montalto should have been scarcely less conciliatory than the haughty summons of his offended mistress herself. Alas! why will lovers write in haste, or rather, why do they ever write at all? In this case, Montalto's reply was as follows:—

“You may spare both your menaces and your taunts. That conflict, to which you apparently allude, is now inevitable, and you cannot await more anxiously than I do myself, the hour when it may take place. In the meanwhile, though the ring which you mention has ceased to have any real value in my eyes, it is, for the present, absolutely required, as one of the tokens which can most effectually vindicate my own conduct from the malignant aspersions with which it has been assailed. You must therefore allow me still to retain that pledge of your former sentiments.”

We will not attempt to analyse the feelings of the indignant Fernanda, when she perused this letter. It will be sufficient to say, that, on the subsequent morning, Rosetta requested admittance of Montalto, and delivered to him, on the part of her mistress, a small packet, containing the brooch he had purchased for her from Spinosa, and the following note:—

“If you knew me better, you would think it wiser and safer to trifle with me no further. I send, by Rosetta, your brooch, which, in the hurry of the moment, I entirely forgot

to forward with my previous letter, and I have desired her to bring me back my ring. I am sure that any cavalier and man of honour that you will consult, will urge you at once to comply with my rightful demand. Surely, our intercourse should end in a manner becoming to us both; and you cannot wish me to regret that it should not have ceased, ere I have learnt that robbery, as well as falsehood, was among your accomplishments."

From a few very guarded words, which he addressed to the smiling tire-woman, Montalto clearly saw that she was, or feigned to be, in complete ignorance, both as to the subject, and as to the tone of his present correspondence with her mistress. He merely, therefore, returned the brooch to her, with the following few lines to Doña Fernanda:—

"As you yourself have suggested the intervention of some third party, in our present difference, I may tell you, that I yesterday evening confidentially consulted upon the matter, two friends, themselves, I can assure you, both cavaliers and men of honour. Their opinion is, that I am fully justified in retain-

ing, for the present, the pledge which you require, and that the inscription which the ring bears points distinctly to the only terms upon which I could fairly be called upon to surrender it, after all that has occurred. As I am determined to abide by this opinion, it rests with you to decide, whether the ring shall remain in my possession, or return to yours."

A deep blush of indignation mantled, for a moment, the lovely features of Fernanda, when she cast her eyes over this singular note; but her first expression of anger and resentment gradually gave way to a transient smile of deep intelligence and meaning, called forth, apparently, by some sudden, though, perchance, not less vindictive inspiration. After a very few minutes of reflection, she seized her pen, and wrote as follows:—

"I shall say no more now. When you have ascertained how the daughters of Spain can avenge their injuries, remember what senseless provocation you have given, and what repeated warning you have received;

above all, recollect what you yourself have ventured to require."

"Here! take that at once to the Principe," said Fernanda to her maid. "Well, what is that in your hand, child?"

"It is the brooch, madam," replied Rosetta, scarcely daring to meet the eye of her mistress, which now glowed with a fire that she had never beheld there before.

"The brooch!" cried the Marquesa. "Why on earth did not you leave it with the Principe, as I told you, whether he would or not. Here! give it to me now!" and seizing it vehemently, she cast it with such force on the marble pavement, that the light settings were dashed to atoms, and the priceless gems dispersed in every direction.

"O Gesu Maria!" exclaimed the terrified attendant, in increased bewilderment, "what will the Prince say?"

"Silence, minion," cried Fernanda; "never again mention that name before me; and beware how you, too, trifle with me. Come! take up those fragments, and carry them back

with the letter; or rather—stay—leave them there for the present, and tell the Florentine Spinosa to come to me forthwith. That will do—begone at once!”

Thus ended the correspondence between the Marquesa di Sierra Hermosa and the Principe di Montalto.

## CHAPTER VIII.

DURING several days, the young Prince remained under the surgeon's care, impatiently awaiting the time when he should be considered sufficiently recovered to exchange a more formal cartel with Don Luis; and he was one morning remonstrating with the worthy practitioner, upon the now apparently unnecessary precautions which were prescribed, when his equerry entered, and delivered to him a letter just arrived for him by express.

"A letter by express!" exclaimed Montalto; "from whom can it be?"

"It is from the castle of Montalto, my lord,

and, I believe, from the Princess your aunt herself."

"From my aunt! it is not her hand. Let me see."

He opened the missive, and read as follows:—

"MY DEAR NEPHEW,

"You will excuse my claiming the kind assistance of my new chaplain, the most worthy father in God, Bonifacio, in thus addressing you; but I have been lately suffering from a return of the rheumatic pains in my hand, which prevent me from using my pen. I trust that you are well, and that, while enjoying with moderation the pleasures of the court, you are not neglecting your spiritual duties, and the advice of the holy Fra Guiseppe, to whom do not fail to remember me. This present is written principally with a view of recommending, for a day or two, to your especial care, one of my pages, whom I have dispatched to Palermo, for the purpose of making some indispensable purchases for me. I am

particularly anxious that, during his short stay in the town, he should not be exposed to any of the usual dangers and temptations with which, unfortunately, a large city will ever abound; and I feel assured, that you will receive him at your house, and keep a watchful eye over him, until he return to me. He will be much the more welcome, if he brings me a satisfactory account of your health, and some hope that you will soon be enabled to accomplish the visit to Montalto which you have long promised me.

"Believe me, my dear child, with every feeling of interest,

"Your affectionate Aunt,

"CAROLINA DI MONTALTO."

"Andrea," said Montalto, after perusing this letter, "where is the page that brought the despatch?"

"Page, my lord? I have seen none. The letter was delivered to me by a palfrey-man, who said he would call again later in the day."

“Very well; I suppose he will then bring the boy with him. Take care that everything is provided for their accommodation, as they may stay here a day or two. That will do. And now, Dottore,” continued Montalto, “you may say what you please, but I am determined to go to this supper to-night, at Cariarti’s. I shall never recover, except I shake myself a little, and it is indispensable that I meet Don Luis before the end of the week. The honour of Sicily requires it, as much as my own.”

“There is no use, Monsignor, in my attempting to forbid what you are so determined to do,” replied the surgeon. “Pray, let me remind you, however, that the pulse is still high, and that the slightest excess must cause a relapse.”

“Never fear, Ambrosio, I shall drink nothing but water—and now for my toilette.”

In the proceedings at the Conte Cariarti’s, on that evening, we have, properly speaking, no concern. We will not, therefore, inquire whether Montalto strictly adhered to his promise; whether many pledges were not given and

received, in the choicest wines of Sicily, with respect to the forthcoming encounter; whether or not, Fernanda's name was always mentioned with the respect due to so high-born a lady; and whether the varied commentaries to which her recent conduct, her ring, and the singular inscription that the latter bore, were subjected, may have been such as she would herself have countenanced or approved. Suffice it to say, that the night was far advanced ere Andrea was summoned to meet his master, and that the faithful equerry was so overjoyed at his appearance, that he could not withstand complimenting him upon the marked improvement which had seemingly taken place in his health and spirits, since they had parted in the morning.

"Why, yes, I certainly am much better," replied the Principe, "as I felt sure that I should be, from the moment that I again mixed in the society of my friends. I think I shall be ready for Don Luis, Andrea, by the end of the week."

"I trust so, indeed, my lord. I hear that

he is not quite so handy with the sword as with the lance."

"Perhaps not; the immense strength of his arm will tell less with this lighter weapon. Here! just draw for a moment, and show me again that Parisian thrust of yours, of which, I dare say, these Spanish Hidalgos have no conception."

"Here it is, Signor—two points in quarte, one in tierce, and then the full thrust. Rather quicker, sir—that is better. I once, myself, despatched a man exactly thus, within a stone's-throw of the Louvre, when I was in the service of the Vicomte de Rohan. That is quite right."

"Very well; now light me to my bedroom."

When they entered this chamber together, both Montalto and his attendant started back in extreme surprise; for, in the corner of the room, opposite the door, several of the huge cushions of the divan had been laid on the floor, and upon them a light and youthful figure was reclining, apparently in profound sleep.

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that his gentle blood would never submit to the insult of such company; finally, that he had insisted upon complying with the Princess's orders, and remaining in the apartments of her nephew himself—at least, until he could see him, and fully explain the whole case to him.

“Was it so, indeed?” said Montalto; “well, I admire his spirit, and he certainly will not be deficient in some of the qualities of a page. Let him remain there now; he will not do any harm. I suppose he got tired of waiting for me; and no great wonder, for the night is already nearly spent. You may retire now, Andrea.”

When his attendant had withdrawn, Montalto threw himself upon a couch, and, in the solitude of his chamber, the momentary excitement of his spirits soon vanished, while his thoughts returned to the sad subject, which, of late, had wholly engrossed them. He remembered the happy days, when, in the joyous exultation of triumphant love, he would rush to the abode of Fernanda, as to the appointed home of his soul, and pour forth at her feet

the long and unrepressed tale of his passion. How the smile would then break upon her haughty countenance! how the suppliant eye would deprecate his ardent gaze! how the frail hand would tremble, when detained enclosed in his own! And now their hearts were severed—now the proud defiance had been exchanged, and repeated; now they were parted for ever!

“Poor unconscious child!” muttered he, as his looks again fell upon the graceful form of the recumbent page. “How I would that my sleep could be like thine! How little dreamest thou of the trials and sorrows that await thee, when thou shalt have reached that manhood, into which thy spirit is, doubtless, so eagerly rushing! Thou, too, perchance, art already loved for thy gentle bearing, for the exquisitely moulded proportions of thy fragile form, and for those clustering locks which so effectually conceal thy youthful face! Even thus thou mayst be loved by some lonely heart! But how many will sigh for thee, ere long, when age will have strengthened and matured

the more than feminine slightness of thy figure, and when the full and proud stature of thy manlier years will have been attained! And, yet, how oft thou, too, wilt be deceived and betrayed by the fickle beings, whose fatal dominion none may withstand. Ay, deceived and betrayed! Such is ever our lot!"

With these mournful reflections, Montalto retired to his rest; but fitful and agitated were the slumbers that visited his pillow. There was no oblivion of the past in that sleep; but all the sad events of the last ill-starred month appeared again to break upon his distracted mind, with circumstances more appalling than the stern reality itself.

He was again in the lists, before the assembled court; again fortune had frowned upon his lance; and again the mortal defiance had been exchanged with Don Luis. But all the terrors of night sat heavy upon his heart, and his arm was as powerless as that of a child. His adversary was pressing hard upon him, and loud were the cheers of the spectators, as they hailed his disgrace, and approaching

defeat. Nor was Fernanda's image wanting to complete the horrors of his vision; her bright eye kindling with vindictive triumph, and her exulting voice rising even above the shouts of the tumultuous crowd.

And then the scene was changed. He was again seated by the gaming-table, at the Principessa di Colonna's; the hour for withdrawing was at hand, and, with her most playful smile, the Marquesa was calling upon him to accompany her. How his heart flew to that summons! and yet he could not move. A power, greater than every effort of his frame, and every impulse of his mind, rivetted him to the fatal spot. He arose, at last, and how eagerly he followed her! but he could behold her no more. She was gone—she was lost for ever!

Such were the dreams, which, in rapid succession, flitted before the restless Montalto, as the few remaining hours of that troubled night flew past. At length, the grey dawn began to trace its pale streaks upon the silken curtains of his apartment, and then a vision, more distinct and more fearful than any of its fore-

runners, startled his bewildered senses into the last paroxysms of terror. He was in the van of a bloody onslaught; but, again his strength failed him—again the sword had fallen from his impotent hand, and the death-grasp of an adversary was encircling his throat. He struggled madly for the breath of Heaven; and so wild were his efforts, that the baneful trance was partially dispelled.

This time, all was not the mere creation of his fevered sleep. A slight figure was kneeling upon his couch, and was quietly pressing the hilt of a poniard to his very heart. Then was heard a low laugh of triumph,—the dagger was removed to his throat, and the golden chain, which alone guarded the mystic ring, was severed. He was released, and a light step was heard fast retiring from the room.

A few seconds elapsed ere Montalto could sufficiently recall his scattered senses, to spring from his resting-place, to slip on hastily his furred dressing-cloak, and to follow fast on the traces of the daring intruder. But the

stranger had already withdrawn, closing behind him, as he fled, the outer door of the apartment, so as effectually to baffle all attempts at pursuit.

"The page! It must be the page!" cried Montalto, his whole consciousness fast returning. Gazing intently around, he beheld the lowly couch of his youthful guest still there, but all untenanted; and no trace of his passage could be discerned, saving a very small packet deposited on the dressing-table. This Montalto proceeded to open, in breathless excitement. It contained Spinoso's brooch, but entirely reset: the two hearts were severed, and on the badge, which no longer united them, could be traced the ominous words, "*Parted for ever.*"

And now the whole fearful reality burst upon his mind. The page, who, during the solitary hours of that night, had been so gently reclining almost at his side, and all in his power—that page, whose exquisitely moulded form he had so long contemplated, in listless abstraction—that page, whose knee was but a second

before, upon his pillow, and whose slender arm he had actually seized, for a moment—that page was Fernanda herself. Now was she avenged indeed: the pledge had been redeemed on his own insulting terms.

How could we attempt to retrace the wild paroxysms of despair which then ensued—how Montalto knelt by the silken cushions, which still retained the slight impression of that slender form—how he frantically invoked every patron saint, beseeching them to restore, were it but for a moment, his triumphant fugitive. Could he have detained her but for one second—could he have recognised her ere she had vanished from his eyes, she must have listened to him—she must have heard him pour forth at her feet his frenzied supplications, and then all would have been forgiven—all would have been forgotten, saving the mutual and unconquered devotion of their hearts. And to think that she had been there, in his chamber—all her fragile being within his very reach and grasp, throughout the long, lonesome hours of that

entire night, and yet all unknown, all unsuspected.

When the first ravings of his grief were exhausted, Montalto endeavoured to reflect, with some degree of calmness, upon the course which it might yet be expedient for him to pursue. "She was here herself," thought he. "She has sought, of her own accord, an interview with me. She cannot—she will not, refuse to see me for a few minutes, to hear me own all my folly, all my guilt, and all my remorse. She will listen, at least while I humbly confess, that if I must attempt to live away from her, and without her love, no earthly existence could be endured without her forgiveness and her pity. She will not spurn me from her, she that but just now was my willing, nay, my unbidden guest. Surely, this was but a playful device, well conceived by her, to recover her whole dominion over my soul. I will fly to her as soon as the hour permits, and if I can but approach her, all may yet be redeemed."

Thus was the distracted lover again at the gates of the Marquesa's palace, ere the

hour for her morning siesta had struck. But great was his surprise, and still greater his indignation, when he was positively refused admittance. In vain did he, in his sternest voice, warn the sturdy porter to offer no obstacle to his passage. The official, in the most respectful, but most uncompromising terms, insisted upon enforcing the distinct command of his mistress, by allowing no one whomsoever to have access to her on that morning.

The Principe was renewing his unavailing efforts to persuade the obdurate attendant, that no such order could apply to him, when the door leading to Fernanda's private rooms was suddenly thrown open, and Don Luis himself issued forth from the strictly-guarded apartment. Their eyes met, and no words of defiance were required to convey the fervent and mutual impulse of their minds.

"If you are sufficiently recovered to use your sword," said La Cerda, with his usual calmness, "we can proceed through yonder

side-door into the garden, where we need fear no interruption."

"Lead the way, and I will follow," was Montalto's reply.

They entered the garden together, and, avoiding that portion which was in view of the lower windows of the palazzo, they retired to a sequestered corner, where, under the shade of a wide-spreading sycamore tree, they prepared for the mortal encounter.

It was not the first time that Montalto's sword had been crossed, in mortal defiance, with the weapon of a rival; but the scene, the circumstances, and the recollection of the harassing visions of the night before, all tended to inspire him with that transient sentiment of awe, which even the bravest must feel at a moment when existence itself is at stake. Never had the glorious sun of the Mediterranean shone with greater splendour upon the orange groves of its cherished island, than in that hour of mortal strife. The young Principe cast one look, perchance his last, upon the beaming sky, and then depositing his cloak

and doublet, he bared his breast for the approaching affray.

"One of us must never again leave this spot alive!" exclaimed he, thoughtfully; "methinks it will be a noble day for his soul to reach its permanent abode."

"It is a hot day at all events, for such business as ours," said the sterner Don Luis. "If it were not for this tree, I think we had better have deferred the meeting until evening. Are you ready now?"

Montalto bowed assent. Their weapons crossed, and each combatant was soon intently engaged in testing the skill and force of his adversary. Both were able, experienced, and well-matched swordmen; and had Montalto been entirely restored to his usual frame of mind and of body, the day would have gone hard indeed for Don Luis. After several feints and passes, the Principe attempted Andrea's stoccata, and so successfully, that, had not La Cerda rapidly drawn back, he must have been severely wounded.

"That is the last Parisian *punto-reverso*,"

said the Spaniard, with a grim smile; "but the lunge should have come quicker on the feint."

They met again, and now, the strength of his antagonist began to tell fearfully against the enfeebled arm of Montalto. Twice he parried with matchless skill the deadly passes of his adversary, and once he so effectually returned them, as to wound him slightly in the arm; but finally the fortunes of Spain again prevailed.

"There is your stoccata," said La Cerda, sarcastically, as he accomplished, with irresistible effect, the very pass of which Andrea had spoken with such confidence. So desperate was the thrust, that Montalto's body was pierced through, until the curiously-carved hilt actually resounded upon his chest; and when the stern Spaniard withdrew his blood-smeared weapon, the luckless Principe fell senseless to the ground.

Even the relentless Don Luis was a little staggered, upon beholding the victory which he had achieved; and, hastening to summon his own attendants and those of Montalto, he de-

sired the Principe to be conveyed back to his palazzo with the utmost care.

Great was the alarm and grief of Andrea, upon beholding his young master in this sad condition; and when the surgeon, who had been immediately sent for, appeared, he could have desired no more trusty or careful attendant than the devoted equerry.

"I fear it is a desperate wound," muttered Andrea, when the sagacious practitioner had completed his first and very minute inspection.

"Very serious indeed," replied the latter; "I must open it a little, to stop, if possible this internal hemorrhage. I will then apply the first dressings, and, until they are removed, none but a prophet of Heaven could express any positive opinion as to the final issue."

## CHAPTER IX.

ABOUT ten days after this untoward adventure, as the Marquesa de Sierra Hermosa was arising, and preparing for her first toilette, she looked around, and, missing her favourite Rosetta, desired that she should be immediately called.

“Well, don’t you understand me?” repeated she, impatiently, to her inferior attendants, among whom this not unusual order seemed to create singular confusion; “are you not aware yet that I wish no one but Rosetta to dress my hair?”

Upon this, one of the waiting-maids, after

having exchanged glances with the others, retired, and returning soon afterwards, announced that her absent companion was not to be found.

"How do you mean?" said the Marquesa; "she has no authority from me to be away at this hour. Go and inquire when she went out. — Well, don't you hear, or can't you understand?"

"I humbly beg your highness's pardon," replied the tire-woman; "but I believe Rosetta went out last night, and has not since returned."

Fernanda looked sternly in the face of her maid, to ascertain if she was speaking the truth, and then coldly desired that the delinquent should be sent to her as soon as she came home.

Within half an hour, Rosetta was ushered in, her face pale with watching, and her whole appearance singularly dejected and awe-stricken.

"Leave me alone with her," said the Marquesa; and the other attendants immediately withdrew.

"Well, you unfortunate child," she then continued, "tell me, if you can, what has occurred, and how you have been induced so far to forget the respect which you owe, to my service at least, if not to yourself."

"I humbly entreat your highness's pardon," said the terrified Rosetta; "but I had fully purposed to be back in time to wait upon you this morning."

"And do you intend to say, minion, that you consider that a sufficient excuse for such proceedings? You really must have lost your senses. Give me a distinct account of what has occurred, or prepare to leave this house immediately."

"Oh, do not speak to me thus, madam," cried Rosetta, falling at her feet; "my uncle can account to you for all—it is at his request that I have been assisting him during the whole night."

"Assisting him! What do you mean?"

"Oh, pardon me, madam," said Rosetta, pressing her mistress's hand to her lips; "but he is—dying."

“Who is dying?—your uncle?”

“Oh, no, madam, not he, but the person whose name you told me never to mention again;” and here the kind-hearted attendant burst into tears.

Fernanda started to her feet, gazed intently upon Rosetta, and, after several ineffectual efforts to recover some appearance of composure, said—

“I suppose you allude to the Principe di Montalto? I had understood that he was fast recovering from his wounds. Has there been any relapse?”

“No, madam, no relapse; but they are deceiving you as to his real condition,—indeed they are. The surgeon has scarcely had a moment’s hope since the first hour, and now, though the wound is perhaps no worse, the pulse will not fall, and the mind itself is giving way more and more.”

“His mind giving way, do you say?”

“Yes, madam. Oh, it would move a marble block to behold him starting up during each hour of the live-long night, rushing always to

the same corner of the room, and addressing the vacant air, as if one—some one whose image is ever present—were standing there before him. My uncle was so weary with watching, that I could not withstand replacing him last night, while he took a few hours' sleep. He will allow no one but me, madam, to take his place, or, of course, I should not have been induced to stay so long away without your highness's leave."

"Very well, that is enough. I can do nothing for him, but you may go again whenever you are wanted. Now, finish my toilet as speedily as you can."

Rosetta proceeded at once with her accustomed task; and though the Marquesa spoke no more, well could the faithful attendant retrace, on the Venetian mirror before her, the wild conflict of emotions, which, in rapid alternation, heightened and dispelled the colour of Fernanda's cheek, and contracted her brow with such an intense expression of internal suffering. At length, the long-streaming hair had been braided into the fantastic head-dress

of the day, and Fernanda had sprung hastily from her stool, when, suddenly falling back and clasping her ankle, she exclaimed—

“Santa Maria!—what agony! I must have sprained my foot!”

“Indeed, Signora! Oh, no, it cannot be. Lean on me; come at least as far as the couch. Evidently you are in great pain. Shall I not run for the surgeon?”

“The surgeon! nonsense, child. Here! lend me your arm again. It is of no use. O Gesu Maria, have pity upon me!”

“Dear madam, pray let me run for the surgeon. He lives close at hand. I really must; I cannot bear to see you in such pain;”—and ere her mistress could reply, she had already left the room.

Within a very few minutes, the anxious attendant returned, in company with the learned Ambrosio. This personage, after a very minute examination of the frail instep which was placed under his care, pronounced it to be very slightly sprained, and prescribed complete rest, with the frequent application

of a lotion, in quest of which Rosetta was despatched forthwith.

"Pray, sit down, Signor," said the Marquesa, "until she returns, for I should wish you to show me how your prescription is to be applied."

The surgeon obeyed this injunction, and a moment of silence ensued.

"Have you many patients under your care at present?" resumed the Marquesa.

"Yes, madam. The late tournament has given me some occupation."

"Were any of the injuries received, serious?"

"No, madam; all the combatants I have visited are doing very well, happily, saving the Principe di Montalto—"

"Ah!" said Fernanda, "I have heard a bad account of him;—but I hope it may not be true."

The surgeon shook his head, and said—

"That is a most dangerous case, for I have to deal with the mind as well as the body; and the former is a wayward and restless patient indeed."

"But surely the wound is healing by this time—it is nearly a month since it was received."

"A month, madam! is it possible that your highness does not know the circumstances?"

"What circumstances do you mean?" exclaimed Fernanda. "The Prince was hurt at the tourney, which took place nearly a month since. Has anything subsequently occurred?"

"Oh no, madam! not to my knowledge," replied the surgeon, still a little confused at the involuntary indiscretion of his former remark; "but time flies so fast, that I had no conception that it was already a month since that festa."

"I trust he may recover," said the Marquesa, coldly, "for though I fear he would be but a small loss to the chivalry of this country, it is always sad to see one so young carried away. I should, besides, be truly grieved on account of his aunt; and, since you are here, as I must write to her to-day or to-morrow, I wish you would explain to me what the symptoms are?"

“Certainly, madam, if your highness will consent, for most urgent motives, that the details should remain secret between us. I have to deal first with a deep wound, which has pierced through the left lung, and which is healing as well as I could expect, owing to the strength and great youth of the patient; but, I have also to contend with a very high fever, which I cannot subdue, and which, as I much fear, may settle upon the brain. Some extraordinary circumstance or recollection appears to weigh heavily upon the Principe’s mind, and fatally to deprive him of all repose. I have lately called to my assistance my learned medical brother, who was reckoned, when at Naples, the very first consulting doctor there; and he is as much at a loss as I am, both as to the diagnostics of the case and as to the therapeutic prescriptions.”

“And so you cannot ascertain what is the cause which thus distracts his mind?”

“The origin, madam, if I may make bold thus to speak before your highness, is apparently that of those sufferings most common at

the Principe's age. His affections have doubtless been crossed or slightly treated, and his mind has thus been worked into its present alarming state."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, madam; it would seem as if he had lately been abandoned by some person whom he must have been in the habit of seeing, occasionally at least, at his side, and whose prolonged absence he cannot endure. I have witnessed before, many a case of mental derangement, but have never seen anything so striking and so impressive as his wild invocations to this real or fantastic being, whose desertion thus affects him."

"Does he remember any name in his delirium?" inquired Fernanda, who had been listening with almost breathless anxiety to these particulars.

"No, madam; at least I have never heard any name, saving those general designations, by which youthful lovers will most frequently call upon an absent and inexorable mistress."

The conversation was here interrupted by

the entrance of Rosetta, with the prescribed lotion; and so marvellous was its effect, that within an hour, the Marquesa was walking about her room as lightly as if no accident had occurred. No sooner was her toilette concluded, than she dispatched her attendant to the assistance of Andrea, warning her, however, that her services would again be required within two hours; and though, at the appointed time, Rosetta brought back a more favourable account than could be anticipated, she was again authorized to pass the afternoon with her uncle, in terms that very much resembled an injunction.

Of all the sprains from which the slight ankle of any fair lady has suffered, none perhaps can have ever been more singular and unaccountable in its varying symptoms, than that with which the Marquesa was inflicted at this time. When alone, she would move about the room, with all the ease and rapidity of her usual bearing; but as soon as any one entered, the pain would apparently return with great intensity; and thus the assistance of the sur-

geon was more than once required, upon that and the two subsequent days. During these visits, contrary to her ordinary practice on all similar occasions, Fernanda desired to remain alone with her learned visitor; and no sooner had her own case been hastily examined, than the conversation would again become general. It is not surprising that Signor Ambrosio, being much engrossed with the care of Montalto, and the Marquesa being anxious to give a very accurate account, to the venerable Princess, of the condition of her nephew, the state of the wounded cavalier should have been very frequently alluded to; and though we can have no doubt that all real and deep anxiety as to the fate of her discarded lover was long since banished from Fernanda's mind, circumstances would scarcely have put her in possession of more frequent and authentic particulars with respect to him, even had their former happy intercourse remained uninterrupted.

Three days had elapsed since the morning on which the Marquesa's painful accident had occurred, when Don Luis de la Cerda, whose

attendance had of late been rather less assiduous than before, waited upon her, and asked her permission to converse with her alone for a few minutes.

The secret and unaccountable feeling of awe with which the presence of her dark-browed relative had ever inspired her, and which seemed to increase rather than to diminish, with their more intimate acquaintance, was so apparent in Fernanda's countenance at this request, that he could not forbear adding, with a slight smile,—

“Be not alarmed, my fair cousin; what I have to communicate to you, though of a serious nature, need give you no apprehension.”

The Marquesa desired Rosetta to remain in attendance at the further extremity of the next room, and requested her kinsman to proceed.

“I think I understood from you, some time since,” said Don Luis, “that, aware of the important interests which require your presence in Spain, you were anxious to proceed there shortly.”

“Such was indeed my intention.”

"You also led me to hope that you would allow me the great honour and gratification of accompanying you on this rather perilous voyage."

"I believe I did say something to that effect."

"Then I wish to inform you that an untoward circumstance will oblige me to leave Palermo, by the very galleon which is now fitting out in the harbour for Spain; and as it is a noble vessel, perfectly equipped and manned, I have thought that it might be in accordance, both with your wishes and with your comfort, to take this opportunity of regaining your native land."

"And when will this vessel sail?"

"At the end of the week, I believe."

"The end of this week! I shall never be ready so soon. See! in the first place, I cannot leave my couch; and then, how could my women have time to make, during so short a space, all the necessary preparations? But you surely can wait until another opportunity offers."

Don Luis remained silent for a moment, and then said—

“I should indeed be most loath to embark without you, if you really purpose going shortly to Spain; but I am under a solemn promise to the Viceroy to leave Palermo by this very vessel.”

“To the Viceroy! May I inquire under what circumstances so singular an engagement can have been contracted?”

Don Luis fixed his dark, stern look full on the anxious countenance of his mistress, and said—

“I think, fair cousin, that you cannot be entirely ignorant of the motive, though we have both, as yet, not unnaturally avoided alluding to it.”

“I protest that I am totally unaware of your actual meaning.”

“In truth? Have Rosetta and Ambrosio, then, so completely concealed from you the cause of the Principe di Montalto's present indisposition?”

“I have made no particular inquiries from them upon the matter,” replied Fernanda,

while a faint blush, and the tremulous motion of her lips, came but in very slight confirmation of the haughty indifference which she attempted to assume.

"But you, at least, know, if others do not," proceeded the inexorable Le Cerda, "that it is not from the effects of his unfortunate exhibition at the tourney, that he is suffering now."

"What can you mean?" exclaimed Fernanda, hastily, and then endeavouring to master, or at least to conceal, her agitation, she added, in a more subdued voice, "Pray, fair Signor, continue your narrative as if speaking to one who is in absolute ignorance of all its particulars; for I vow that you will be deceiving yourself, and totally unintelligible to me, if you proceed under any other impression."

"Then, simply, my lovely cousin, as it concerns us both that you should know it, allow me to tell you, that, since the tourney, the Prince de Montalto and I have met, as cavaliers should meet, who have a serious difference

to dispose of; that my sword found its usual and fitting sheath full in the breast of my adversary; and that, notwithstanding all our best endeavours to keep this encounter secret, some vague rumours respecting it have reached the Viceroy's ear. You have, doubtless, heard how severe are the recent orders of the Holy Inquisition on matters of this nature; and you will not be surprised that the Duke, to avoid the painful necessity of being called upon to apply them in this case, should have demanded, and obtained, my promise of retiring, for a short period, from his court."

"And does the most Holy Inquisition require that I also should be driven into exile for this offence?" inquired Fernanda, endeavouring to conceal, under the semblance of her wonted playfulness, the anxiety which tortured her mind.

Again that dark and sinister eye was fixed upon her, as if to penetrate the innermost recesses of her heart; and, for the first time, the voice and manner of Don Luis corresponded

with the gloomy severity of his look, when he thus addressed her—

“I have seen, Doña Fernanda, whether in the lists, on the field of honour, or in the front of the onslaught, as many a human life sacrificed as any other soldier of my age; and I have not been reckoned very remiss, when called upon myself to destroy that precious gift, which no human power, no human prayer, no human regret, can ever restore. Still, you must excuse me, if I say, that I have never found—whether in the act itself, or in the recollections to which it may subsequently give rise—a subject of mirth or of sarcasm. For these fearful and bloody deeds, which they themselves commit, men must, of course, remain responsible; but if the Inquisition, or the common laws of the land, seek out and punish the hand which strikes the blow, the more equitable judgment of the public will often inquire who armed that hand, and who arrayed in mortal defiance those who otherwise might have expended the whole of their natural ex-

istence on terms of mutual esteem and amity?"

Here, observing the unearthly paleness which was overspreading the lovely features of Fernanda, the stern monitor paused for a moment. She endeavoured to raise her eyes, but they could not meet his glance, and her voice was tremulous with unsubdued terror, when, mustering her utmost fortitude, she said—

"You must proceed a little further with this homily if you mean it to be intelligible."

"I would willingly say," replied Don Luis, "all that may be requisite to make myself understood, and nothing that can possibly give any offence or any pain. I never was the Principe di Montalto's friend; I despise his nation, and I see no motive for entertaining any particular regard for him. Still, it is doubtful whether our paths would ever have crossed, were it not for particular circumstances which I need not recall before you; and, though he voluntarily rushed upon the doom which he has encountered, his friends

—and he has many here—will comment upon the real cause of the premature fate which, I much fear, is even now awaiting him.”

“Of course,” cried Fernanda, bursting into an agony of tears, “I am to be responsible for every thing; and because you choose to convert an honourable and courteous pastime into a pretext for mortal quarrel, I, who have done nothing but to comply with your wishes, am to be basely traduced and insulted in every hostelry of Palermo. Now I see that I am friendless and unprotected indeed.”

“Speak not thus lightly,” replied La Cerda. “The Castilian blood is not yet so frozen in my veins, as to bear with a single unbecoming reflection which any man here might venture to direct, in my presence, against a lady with whom I may proudly claim kindred, whatever the Sicilian cavaliers may whisper among themselves when I am away. It is not they whom you need fear. But there are tongues, as you may already know, which the sword of the Cid himself could not control, and they, I fear, are scarcely disposed to remain silent with respect

to the events of the last month. Seriously, Fernanda, though no one can fairly impute to you anything further than the most excusable imprudence, you have been more talked of lately than is consistent with your high and unsullied reputation; and your best friends think, that as your departure from this town had long since been fixed at about this date, you would do well—very well, not to defer it. Such is, I assure you, the decided opinion of the Duchess, who, though rather annoyed at the reception she appears to have met with here, when she last called upon you, still preserves the liveliest interest in everything that concerns you.”

“It really is marvellous, that people will take such interest in everything that least concerns them,” retorted Fernanda, bitterly. “It is they who give rise to all these false and scandalous reports to which the fame of ladies and the lives of men must afterwards be sacrificed. God knows, that if I hesitate to leave Palermo at present, it is from no extreme affection or gratitude towards

those with whom it has been my unfortunate fate to associate here."

"Then do not scruple to follow the advice of your truest friends, and to retire, for a time at least, from a scene, where your presence being no longer required to repel calumny, can now only give rise to further unpleasant, if not fatal consequences."

"Very well," answered Fernanda, impatiently; "I will think over all you have said, and let you know my resolution. In the meantime, excuse me, if I express a desire to be alone for a short time, after this not very agreeable conversation."

THAT night  
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depart, and confirm, as it were, by a hasty and almost clandestine flight, the bitterest aspersions of her enemies? What! leave Palermo while the youthful life of Montalto was trembling in the scale of destiny! And yet, why remain there, never again to see him; never to claim forgiveness at his feet; never to hear more of him, perhaps, saving that the last fitful struggle was at an end, and that the dread crime was irretrievably consummated? Fearful to witness were her heart-rending sobs, her convulsive invocations to that pure and blessed Intercessor—alas, how oft forgotten of late!—her loud and agonized self-reproaches. Fully, indeed, were they avenged, in that hour, whom it had been, perhaps, more her ill fortune than her fault so fatally to injure.

In vain had the terrified Rosetta been twice refused admittance. She could not endure to remain away from her beloved mistress in such a moment, and her assiduous and tender care finally restored the exhausted Marquesa to a more tranquil frame of mind.

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Rosetta departed in all haste and, within half an hour, her uncle was in the presence of the Marquesa.

"I have wished to see you, Andrea," said she, "that you might truly and faithfully tell me how your master is. Can I believe Ambrosio's more favourable account?"

"Your highness may be assured that there is a decided improvement. The wound is healing fast, the fever is slightly but gradually abating; the mind alone is still very nearly in the same state."

"Indeed! Is he as yet utterly unconscious of your presence when you are there?"

"Alas! madam, he has recognised no one whomsoever, within the last fortnight; and though rather less agitated since yesterday, he shows no further sign of consciousness than before."

A moment's silence ensued, after which the Marquesa, fixing her eyes intently upon the honest equerry, said—

"Andrea, you are a soldier, and a man of

honour. You would never betray a woman's secret."

"Never, so help me God, madam!" replied the sturdy old warrior.

"You see this cross—it was blessed by the Holy Father himself. Swear by that sacred emblem, that never will you mention to any living and mortal being what may occur between us to-day. Swear it, as you hope hereafter for pardon and mercy."

"I swear it here, madam, solemnly, and on my knees."

"That will do. Now tell me," continued Fernanda, in a faltering and scarcely audible voice—"tell me if you have ever overheard that—that name which the——your master I mean, occasionally whispers and invokes in his delirium."

"I have, madam, though, I believe that no one else could have ever distinguished it."

"And that name is——"

"Fernanda, madam."

"You are sure?"

"Perfectly certain, madam."

“And now, tell me if you feel equally confident that the Principe can now recognise no one.”

“Certain, madam; excepting some almost miraculous change has even now come over him.”

“Very well—I will withhold nothing from you, Andrea, as I know how fully and how deservedly you are trusted by your master. What may have occurred, what may have been projected between him and myself, matters not now. We are parted, we are strangers for ever——”

“O, say not so, fair and noble lady. Say not so now.”

“Do not interrupt me, Andrea,” replied the Marquesa, in a calm and firm voice. “Within a very few days I must leave this island, and your master and I will scarcely meet again. Were he in his natural frame of mind, we needs must have parted thus, even thus, without one word of farewell. But if I felt sure, absolutely confident, that he could not recognise me, that he never, by any chance,

could learn the unwarrantable step which I am now contemplating, I would willingly look upon him once more ere I depart from Sicily."

"And why not come now—why not come at once?" exclaimed the honest veteran, hastily brushing away a tear with his rugged hand. "Twice he has perilled his life in your cause—why should you not see yourself how truly his heart is yours, even while his reason is lost."

"I cannot go at present, Andrea," replied Doña Fernanda, in a subdued voice; "but if you will come back alone for me this evening, after nightfall, Rosetta and I can accompany you to the Montalto Palace."

At the appointed time Andrea returned, and the short distance which separated the two residences was traversed by the little party without any accident.

When they had reached the Principe's outer room, the Marquesa desired Rosetta to enter his apartment with her uncle, and to ascertain whether he remained still in the same state of utter unconsciousness. Her attendant's answer having satisfied her upon that point, she

shrouded herself in her mantilla, and crossed, with a faltering step, the threshold of the sleeping-chamber.

She had seen that room before. She well knew the long tapestried hangings, with their quaint martial devices, and the rich and varied arms which profusely decorated it. She well remembered that low narrow couch, the wide spreading lion's skin which covered it, and the sundry and fantastic emblems and instruments of heraldry, of war, and of the chase, which encircled, according to the custom of the age, the resting-place of the youthful cavalier. She had seen all these before, when, with a heart sustained against its own terrors, by a sense of deeply-wounded honour and exulting resentment, she had smiled in defiance of these tokens of superior, but all unavailing power, and had already hailed the prospective triumph so soon to be achieved by her frail hand. She thought of the hour, when, after her long and weary vigils, she had been startled there, from a tremulous and fitful slumber, by the distant sounds of Montalto's approach. She fancied she could again hear the joyous tones of his

voice as, entering, with his equerry, the adjoining room, he had exchanged with him, in careless mockery of the awful and fast-impending morrow, the passes which were to defend his life against the most redoubted sword of Spain—and now, there he lay. By the gentle light of those two long waxen tapers, his reclining form could well be traced through the loose folds of the silken garb which enveloped it; but what languor, what utter exhaustion, in that repose! how pale and wan that sunken cheek, how matted and dishevelled the long flowing locks which almost concealed it!

Followed by Rosetta, the trembling Marquesa approached the couch of sickness, and, as she drew near, it seemed to her that the stern and warlike emblems around were smiling, in grim derision, upon the prostrate and powerless figure of the heart-stricken warrior. Were they pointing to her triumph, and exulting in her victory? She gently raised that hand, with the awe which a bed of suffering will ever impart to a youthful beholder. It was warm as yet; but how feeble and resistless it lay there,

weaker—far weaker now than that which enclosed it! Alas! will it ever again grasp the noble and time-honoured sword of the Montaltos, or unfold, in the soul-exalting array of the lists, or the battle-field, the most renowned standard of Sicilian chivalry? Long did the Marquesa sit there, in sad contemplation of her work of revenge. What would she have given now, again to behold her victim, as she had seen him, even while defying her utmost anger, by the gaming-table in the Princess Colonna's hall, or on the still more fatal morning of the tournament. She looked around—Rosetta and Andrea had withdrawn to the further room, and though she could overhear them conversing in low whispers, they could not behold her. She knelt—yes, gentle reader, the haughty Marquesa di Sierra Hermosa knelt, in that hour, by the couch of her insensible lover, and, pressing her lips to that hand which she still held,—

“May every saint in Heaven,” muttered she, fervently, “forgive me, and preserve and bless thy youthful life. We both have erred, for

we were, indeed, but as children, untaught as yet to master their feelings, and to reflect on the consequences of each unguarded act, and of each unresisted impulse! We now must part, but, oh! not in anger. Part we as those who, while they may not be united, cannot remain wholly estranged. Perchance we never shall meet again; but, if ever I cease to pray for thee, and for thy happiness, may Heaven visit my conduct with the doom which, I fear, it has but too well deserved!"

Fernanda looked round once more, and she was still alone. She rose slowly, and bending over that almost inanimate form, pressed her lips once—but once only—upon the pallid brow of Montalto. She would then have withdrawn; but it seemed as if an iron hand was encircling her heart as she attempted to move away.

Again she sat down, endeavouring thus to recover her composure; and now it appeared to her as if, for the first time, a slight ray of animation broke upon the gloomy and death-like stillness of the Principe's features. He

moved, convulsively, several times, and gently raising the hand which she had lately clasped, pressed it to his throat, as if to remove some secret pain, or avert some impending peril in that direction. Fernanda sprang up hastily, summoned Rosetta, and called her attention to this symptom.

"I have often seen him so before," whispered the attendant; "it is generally thus that his wandering fits commence."

"Let us retire, then," said the Marquesa, softly, "lest his consciousness should return."

"I fear that there is little prospect of that; but, dear madam, if you wish to remain a little longer, I can extinguish one of these tapers; you may close your mantilla a little more around you, and I can leave you here alone with my uncle. Even should the Principe partially recover his senses, and recognise a woman's figure, he will, doubtless, take you for me."

During a few seconds more, Montalto's agitation appeared to increase, as if in the struggles of some harassing vision, and then, raising

himself with a stronger effort, he exclaimed—  
“The page!—the page!”

“Draw aside for a moment, noble lady,”  
whispered Andrea, “he will go to that corner  
of the room opposite the door.”

So it was indeed. Montalto now stood up,  
and folding more closely around him the long  
silken gown, which entirely enshrouded him,  
cast about him one vacant gaze, in which there  
was clearly no distinct perception or intelli-  
gence, and proceeded to that part of the room  
which the equerry had pointed out.

In breathless suspense, Fernanda watched  
her unconscious lover, as, falling on his knees,  
he invoked, in his senseless delirium, the  
phantom that haunted his distracted brain.

“Ha! thou art returned!” cried he, in a tone  
of wild but compressed exultation, which  
thrilled strangely on the heart of one of the  
beholders. “How long I have awaited thee!  
I knew that thou wouldst come to me again,  
for our souls were joined long since in heavenly  
and indissoluble union. Lately I dreamed  
that thou hadst fled, but it was only a dream,

a false hell-born vision which harrowed my fevered slumbers in the first agony of my wound. O, what I have suffered since it has beset my couch!—how I have struggled to drive it away! for I knew that thou wouldst not come to me, and then forsake me, while I am here, dying, Fernanda, for thee! Hadst thou been in truth offended, how easily could thy dagger have avenged thee, when it rested upon my unprotected breast: but thou couldst not strike there. Every throb of my heart told thee of its love. It spoke to thy uplifted hand, and even the relentless steel fell from thy grasp. Oh, bury thy poniard, whenever thou shouldst list, deep, deep into that faithful breast; but never forsake me again,—never again abandon me to the restless tortures of my late despair, or, in truth, my reason will give way. And then, Fernanda, thou wilt come, and I shall not know thee. Thou wilt be here again, even here, in my solitary room, by my lonely couch, and I shall not recognise thee;—and then thou wilt weep—for thy heart was ever tender and womanly,—thou wilt

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fused sounds were overheard,  
were seen, shedding, through  
night, their lurid and fitful

been keeping wild vigils enough," muttered Andrea, impatiently. "I think we had better step back, noble lady, as far as the courtyard of the palazzo, and wait till they have gone by; for I cannot answer for their civility."

Doña Fernanda eagerly complied with this suggestion, and retired, with her companions, behind the shelter of the huge gateway of Montalto's residence.

The joyous band now drew near, and the voices of the highly animated cavaliers became distinctly audible.

"What say you, my masters," cried one; "shall we wake up Montalto, and see how he is getting on?"

"Oh, no," exclaimed another, "that would be poor sport for him; he is very seriously ill."

"I believe he is, indeed," shouted a third; "I do not think that we shall ever see much more of him, except his funeral."

"His funeral! nonsense!" cried several voices.

"I know, well enough, what I say," repeated

the former speaker, "though I cannot say what I know."

"Well, if it is to come to that, he may thank La Sierra Hermosa for it," exclaimed a fresh voice.

"There is no denying that," replied another, "and a crying, burning shame it is that she should still be allowed to flaunt about the court as if nothing had happened."

"Take care that De la Cerda does not hear you," interposed one of the late speakers.

"I care not who overhears—I say that she is a disgrace to this court, and that will be as true as it is now, even if twenty such as Montalto are to fall by the Spaniard's sword for her quarrel."

"Well, she will find them, perhaps, for she is a beauteous creature. How well she did look at that tournament!"

"Ay, but how much better she would look at the cart's-tail!" retorted the indignant cavalier.

A loud shout of laughter here came in commendation of this sentiment, and the joyous party moved on.

"Signora, dear mistress, for Heaven's sake hold up!" whispered the terrified Rosetta; "oh, Santa Rosalia! she is fainting—Andrea—uncle Andrea, help me to support her. We must take her back to the house."

"That is impossible, my dear," replied Andrea. "I had the greatest difficulty, as it was, in keeping the pages out of the way, and now they would see her, and all would be discovered."

"Well then, uncle, hold her for a moment. I will sit down upon this marble step, and you can lay her head upon my lap. Poor, dear lady, no wonder that she should have been so much affected. The cart's tail, indeed! I wish I could see every one of them there during each day of the next month. But, soft!—she seems to be recovering."

"Where am I?" muttered Fernanda, attempting to rise; "surely it is a fearful dream. Ah! Rosetta, and Andrea too. I remember all now. For mercy's sake, let us return home. Oh, would that I had never come!"

## CHAPTER XI.

THE Marquesa reached her palace without any further accident; and the faithful Rosetta did not leave her mistress until she had retired to her couch, to find, alas, but little rest there.

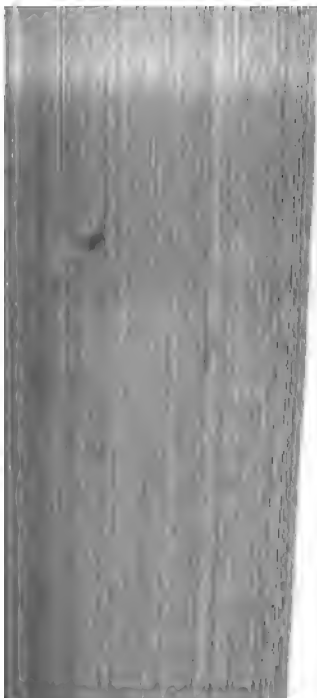
When her waiting-women entered her room on the following morning, they were surprised to find that Doña Fernanda had already arisen. Her cheek was colourless, a deep gloom sat upon her brow, but there was a calm resolution in her air, and a tone of decision in her voice, which told of some sudden and heart-rending determination, irrevocably adopted with all the latent energy of her nature.

"You are already aware," said she, to those

around her, "that I have for some time since been contemplating a voyage to Spain. This, I find that I must now undertake without any further loss of time. You, Rosetta, must send and inquire exactly when that Spanish galleon sails, while the others must make, without any delay, all the requisite preparations."

Having issued these directions, the Marquesa proceeded to write a short note to Don Luis de la Cerda, informing him that she intended to embark upon the vessel which he had mentioned to her, that she reckoned upon his company and protection, but that, as her time would scarcely suffice for making the necessary arrangements, she trusted he would excuse her denying herself to him, as to every one else, until her departure.

In the course of the morning, Rosetta returned to inform her mistress that, the wind being fair, the galleon would sail as soon as was possible on the ensuing morning. She also conveyed to her the gratifying intelligence that the Principe di Montalto was progressing rather more favourably; that he had recog-



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“ Alas, madam  
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you have really forgotten and forgiven my late conduct towards you."

"My dear child!" exclaimed the Vice-queen, "pray do not speak thus. It is much rather I, who should claim your forgiveness, for having so indiscreetly interfered in your most private affairs; but you have yet to learn, how common a fault it is, at my time of life, to obtrude unsolicited advice."

"Say, rather, dear madam, how usual a fault it is at my age, to reject or to undervalue the counsels of friendship and of experience: and now, farewell, again."

"Stay, for a moment, carina," replied the chess; "the Viceroy will never pardon me, I let you depart without bidding him adieu."

The kind-hearted Doña Inez here withdrew a moment, and soon returned with her husband, whose farewell to the Marquesa was less cordial than that of the Duchess herself.

For a few minutes the conversation was directed, on subjects connected with the dif-  
arrangements and chances of the forth-

coming voyage; but when Fernanda again arose to depart, the Viceroy led her aside, for a moment, and said—

“You are going, I hear, under the protection of De la Cerda. You have known him long, I suppose, as, I believe, he is your kinsman?”

“I have been acquainted with him, sir, ever since I first came to Palermo.”

“That appears a long acquaintance, at your age,” replied the Viceroy, with a slight smile; “but I knew him before you were born. Indeed,” continued he, thoughtfully, “few men know De la Cerda better than I do.”

There was something in the manner and tone in which these last few words were uttered, which very singularly arrested Fernanda’s attention. She gazed anxiously into the veteran warrior’s countenance, and said—

“Long as your grace may have known him, you can never, I should think, have seen or heard anything respecting him, which could lead you to think that I have chosen an unfitting protector against the Barbary corsairs.”

"Oh, not at all, my dear child! Don Luis and the corsairs are very well matched. Indeed, it would scarce be safer to trifle with the one than with the others."

"What can your grace mean?" exclaimed Fernanda, rather startled at this observation.

"Shall I really tell you? and will you not be offended, if, with the affection and frankness of a father, I fully state to you the misgiving which has crossed my mind?"

"Offended, sir? I shall be most truly grateful."

"Then, allow me to say, my dear Fernanda," continued the Viceroy, "that, though it has been my fate to meet, and to deal with many men, whose dispositions were none of the mildest, I have never, whether in the court or in the camp, seen one whose resentment and displeasure were more to be dreaded than those of your cousin."

"So you are afraid, sir," interrupted Fernanda, endeavouring to smile, "that my kinsman and I may quarrel on the way, and that I shall have, when we land in Spain, to en-

counter him on the field of honour? Well, I am ready to meet him, even there, with that little poniard you were so good as to give me last year."

"Ah!" said the Viceroy, shaking his head with more than his accustomed gravity; "beware how you jest where he is the subject, and still more where he should be the victim;" and then, in a lower tone, he added, "Montalto is a generous, noble-hearted cavalier, who would die for you, but could never, in cold blood, be brought to injure a hair of your head. Don Luis was cast in a sterner mould; and, should he consider himself aggrieved, none is too high, none too low, none too lovely for his vengeance to reach."

This ominous dialogue was here most opportunely interrupted by the entrance of an officer, who came to call the Viceroy away. He embraced Fernanda, who, again bidding adieu to the Duchess, now hastily retired, more deeply and more durably impressed with the last few words that the Duque de San Lucar had uttered, than with anything that

she had ever heard during the previous course of her life.

Early on the ensuing day, Montalto received a long visit from the learned Ambrosio, and, in the course of their conversation upon the events of the day, was informed by him of the fast approaching departure of the Marquesa di Sierra Hermosa, and of Don Luis. It required more strength than the unfortunate Principe had yet recovered, entirely to conceal the pang of despair which struck upon his heart at this announcement; and though the worthy surgeon's perspicacity was pretty closely confined to professional matters, he could not but observe his patient's emotion. The entrance of Andrea, however, fortunately gave another turn to the discourse, and soon afterwards Ambrosio retired.

No sooner was Montalto alone with his equerry, than he requested him to go forthwith to Spinosa's house, and urge him to return, with the shortest possible delay, the jewel which he had delivered to him on the previous day.

"And look here, Andrea," added he, "remember that I must see Rosetta before she embarks; you must manage that as best you can, but see her I must."

"That will be easily accomplished," replied Andrea, not a little surprised at discovering that his master had been informed of the intelligence which he had himself so sedulously concealed from him. "Rosetta has faithfully promised not to go without bidding me farewell here."

Within an hour the equerry's graceful niece accordingly appeared, and was introduced, all in tears, to the sick chamber of the Principe.

"Well, so your mistress is going?" said Montalto, bitterly.

"She is, indeed," replied Rosetta, in a most mournful voice.

"And very little caring, no doubt, whether she leaves me here dead or alive?"

"Oh! do not speak so, noble Signor; you most unjustly wrong my dear mistress by

such a thought. She has often and anxiously inquired for you of late."

"As much, should you say, as for her Maltese dog, when he was ill last year?"

"Santa Maria!" cried Rosetta, bursting again into tears. "Oh! if you knew all I could tell; but I have vowed never to disclose it. Believe me, however, Signor Principe, when I assure you that she has shown the liveliest interest respecting you."

"Well, well," muttered Montalto, impatiently; "if she does not absolutely hate me, it is all that I can now expect. Look here, Rosetta," continued he, after a moment's silence, "you must bear a message from me to your mistress; but first, see if your uncle is returned."

Andrea, being thus summoned, entered, and delivered to the Principe a small packet which he had just brought back from the jeweller Spinosa.

"That will do, Andrea. It is precisely what I wanted," then resumed Montalto.

"And so, Rosetta, you think she does not quite hate me."

"Hate you, Signor! Oh! what woman could? It is not she, at all events—God is my witness, that it is not she. Some day, I trust, all may be explained—all may be mutually forgiven; but do not press me to say more now. I really cannot—I must not—and indeed, I fear that I should leave you, for by this time, my mistress has doubtless already gone on board."

"Then farewell, carina," said the Principe; "when the ship is actually under way, not before, mind that—or perhaps she might return it again to me, deliver to the Marquesa this small parcel. Say, I would have written, but that I have not strength as yet to hold a pen; and tell her, that as long as life endures, I shall every day, every hour, pray for her happiness. Adieu, my child, and may the blessing of Heaven attend you also."

Rosetta received the little packet from the Principe, hastily pressed his hand to her lips, and having tenderly embraced her uncle,

proceeded without further delay to join her mistress on board the departing vessel. Within an hour, the sails were set, and the wind being fair, the gallant bark was soon borne swiftly away into the offing.

But who could describe the conflicting feelings which tortured and oppressed the love-stricken Fernanda, as she contemplated that fast-receding shore, and mournfully recalled each happy hour which she had known there, while her heart was yet free, or when it had first throbbed with the ecstasy of requited and triumphant love! Long did she gaze upon each well-remembered scene and landmark, from the resting-place of silken cushions strewed for her on the deck, by the orders of Don Luis; and though her eye was tearless, her form all motionless and erect, so forlorn was the grief that sat upon her pallid brow, that for a time, none ventured to approach her. At length Rosetta drew near, and kneeling at her feet, as if to replace more conveniently the velvet cloak which encircled them, deposited, with a trembling

hand, Montalto's packet upon her mistress's knees.

"What on earth is this, child?" exclaimed the Marquesa.

"Dear Madam, it is nothing;—it is only something which the Principe, — which my uncle's master desired me to deliver to you, saying also, that he is too ill to write himself."

"What do you mean, minion," muttered Doña Fernanda, in a lower voice, "and who on earth desired or permitted you to take charge of any such communication?"

"Dear, kind lady, if I have done wrong, pray, pray, forgive me; but he was so pale, so wretched, and so, so anxious that you should receive it, that I had no heart to refuse him."

"That will do—see! they are observing us," whispered the Marquesa, somewhat appeased. "Leave me for a moment, and we will then go down together."

Fernanda, shortly afterwards, accepted the hand of Don Luis, to descend the companion-

ladder, and to inspect the small yet richly furnished apartment which he had prepared for her, below; but no sooner was she left there in private, than she eagerly tore the covering from the parcel which Rosetta had delivered to her. She there beheld the splendid ruby heart of Spinosa's brooch, set anew, but alone this time; and the legend, alas, now only bore these mournful words,—“*Bleeding for ever.*”

Doña Fernanda pressed convulsively to her lips this last single token of rejected and hopeless, but yet all unfailing love, and then, at length, her own overpowered heart gave way, and she burst into an agony of tears.

## CHAPTER XII.

THE voyage of the Marquesa di Sierra Hermosa, and the Señor de la Cerda, was accomplished without any sinister adventure. More than once a small but suspicious-looking vessel, with gigantic lateen sails fully set to the wind, could be discerned following upon the wake of their own ship. But so well-appointed was the latter, and so complete and unceasing the warlike preparations prescribed and observed under the superintendence of Doña Fernanda's ever-vigilant companion, that the stranger deemed it, doubtless, more prudent to alter his course; and Don Luis and his lovely charge were thus enabled to reach, in safety,

and in due season, the fair and ancient city of Barcelona. There they disembarked, and took up their residence for a short time at the house of a mutual and aged relative, who, informed of their unexpected arrival, had warmly pressed them, by letter, to partake of her hospitality.

We must not forget to mention here, that the joy experienced by the Marquesa, on being released from the tedious monotony of the sea passage, was much damped by a slight accident that occurred to her at this time. The ring on which Montalto had inscribed the mystic love-cry of Petrarcha—that ring which Fernanda valued more than the costliest of her jewels, and for the recovery of which she had exposed herself to so much risk and peril—that very ring was missed by her on the day that she set foot upon her native soil. In vain was Rosetta closely interrogated, and most severely reproved; in vain was the most minute investigation ordered by Don Luis, and by the captain of the vessel; no trace of the golden circlet could be discovered, and the afflicted Marquesa was at length led to believe that she

must have dropped it herself, into the sea, whilst embarking upon the boat which was to convey her to the shore. Her grief at this loss was so extreme and unreasonable, as to astonish all that witnessed it; but at length other matters pressed upon her thoughts, and constrained her to discard the almost superstitious terror with which this apparently insignificant event had inspired her.

We have already noticed the deep impression produced upon Doña Fernanda's mind by the last words of advice and of warning which the Sicilian Viceroy had uttered; and she had not failed for a moment, from that hour, intently to scrutinize the bearing of Don Luis, and assiduously to watch over her own manner towards him, so as to preclude, as far as was in her power, the approach to any other feelings than those of mutual esteem and respect. During the whole voyage, notwithstanding the incessant care and attention which her kinsman had bestowed upon her, no indication of any other sentiment than that which she was willing to impart, had been detected by the

Marquesa. But now that they were residing under the same roof, now that they were thrown into daily and hourly intercourse, Fernanda could not but remark that, whether they strolled together under the shady recesses of their wealthy relative's gardens, or sat in almost equal seclusion in that portion of the villa, which had been abandoned exclusively to their use, the gaze of her dark kinsman was incessantly fixed upon her, and that there was more than friendship in that look. We owe it to the Marquesa to state that, no sooner had the foregoing impression or misgiving crossed her mind, than she determined to put matters on such a footing as to prevent any misconception or unfounded expectation from arising on the part of Don Luis. The opportunity which she desired for this explanation was not long withheld.

On the very next day she was seated with her cousin, in an arbour of the gardens, from which an extensive view of the city and of the bay was commanded, and when, after a few moments' silence, she raised her eyes, she

beheld his look again rivetted upon her, with more than its usual intensity.

She returned his gaze for a moment, and then said, in her most sportive tone,—

“We shall know each other again, fair cousin, even if it is to be our fate soon to part.”

De la Cerda, who feared a lady's jest as little as an enemy's defiance, did not for a moment withdraw his eyes, while he calmly answered,—

“If there was any effort or impulse of the will in my look, I suppose I was thinking how entirely you have recovered your matchless beauty, since you have reached the shores of your native land.”

“Perhaps you think that I am much pleased with this intelligence; that is to say, if I may allow myself to credit it.”

“Well, indeed, if it were unpleasant to you, you would scarcely belong to your sex.”

“In truth! Well, what would you say, if I were solemnly to affirm that I would far sooner at present bear the appearance which

I had when I left Palermo, and which was such, if I am to believe Rosetta, that no eye, but that of Compassion, could rest upon me."

"What I should say, Fernanda? perhaps that you thought yourself surer of laying our hearts at your feet, when the white rose of sorrow and languor was on your cheek, in which impression, by the way, you are, perhaps, not mistaken."

"You are entirely wrong there, fair kinsman," replied Fernanda; "and your error proceeds from the common source. You bold cavaliers will ever judge of our softer nature by your own, and think that we are always and unceasingly bent upon conquering, wherever we may discover an occasion or a chance of victory. And yet it is not so, I assure you; we know the perils and the cost of our triumphs, far better than you do; we are early taught, by bitter experience, carefully and accurately to estimate them; and you would, perhaps, be much surprised, could you see how often and how eagerly we long for peace and friendship, when, to use the set

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She returned his gaze, and then said, in her most

"We shall know," she replied, "if I were I  
cousin, even if it should prevail, it  
part." "under forty."

De la Cerda. "You say were I to tell  
little as an ex- many undeserved bless-  
moment with- preserved to me, for none  
answered.—

"If there- find a generous, disin-  
will in my- for no purposes of his  
entirely- view than to offer his  
beauty. support to a lonely and  
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"People-  
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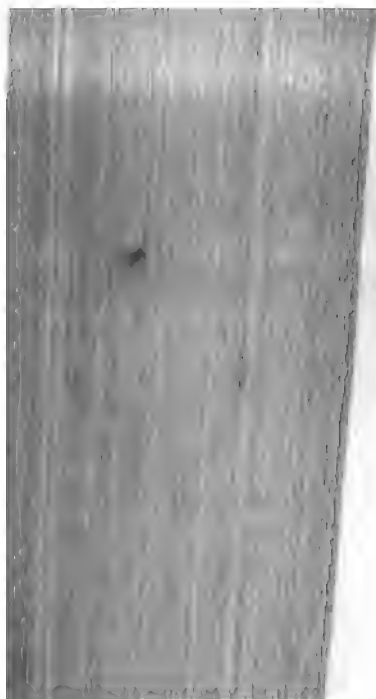
in the mind of his  
therefore replied—

"I have taken, Fernanda, as to your charms, if you have the disposition of ever remaining true to me. You are one of those who would brave every peril, and are worthy to be won at the risk of every value besides."

"What will you do for me if I am not at all?"

"No woman, if you are not to be mine," said Don Luis, his dark eye glowing with more than its usual fire, as it looked upon her; "you are worthy, I say, of the highest price that was ever paid by valour for beauty; that full price, I, for one, will give on any terms or conditions that you may demand; and, by Heaven, you shall never regret the day when you will have followed the dictates of your nature."

"Not so, be assured," replied the Marquesa, showing the utmost fortitude of her will; "I am to be disappointed in my honest expectation of meeting in the world with that sincere, genuine friendship which knows



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"You are much mistaken, Fernanda, as to the real powers of your charms, if you have the slightest apprehension of ever remaining deserted and forlorn. You are one of those for whose smile we would brave every peril, and who are worthy to be won at the risk of all that we may value besides."

"Ay, but what will you do for me if I am not to be won at all?"

"You are no woman, if you are not to be won, Fernanda," said Don Luis, his dark eye glowing with more than its usual fire, as it rested upon her; "you are worthy, I say, of the highest price that was ever paid by valour for beauty; that full price, I, for one, will give, on any terms or conditions that you may appoint; and, by Heaven, you shall never regret the day when you will have followed the law of your nature."

"Not so, be assured," replied the Marquesa, summoning the utmost fortitude of her will; "if I am to be disappointed in my honest expectation of meeting in the world with that true, sincere, genuine friendship which knows

no aim, and seeks no title but its own; if, in this hope—in this confidence—I am now to be disappointed, mark my words, Don Luis: I will seek, in the seclusion of my revered aunt's convent, that freedom and repose of the soul which I have failed in obtaining without its sacred precincts. We two are friends—nothing but friends, or we part forthwith. Now let us return to the house, as I must write to the Duquesa de San Lucar.”

Don Luis remained silent and abstracted during their progress homewards, as well as for the remaining portion of the evening; but when she retired that night to her rest, Fernanda found upon her toilet-table a letter from her kinsman, containing, in the most passionate terms, a full and distinct avowal of his ardent devotion and love. Her determination was at once taken, with characteristic energy. She dismissed her attendants, with the exception of Rosetta alone, and having summoned her equerry, she desired him to make every requisite arrangement so as to enable all three to leave Barcelona

together by daybreak. Thus was his gentle kinswoman on the road to Gerona, there to claim the protection of her great aunt, the Lady Abbess, ere the Signor de la Cerda had himself arisen, on the ensuing morning, which was far advanced before he had ascertained what particulars could be collected from the different members of the household, as to this rapid departure.

Great was his amazement, and far greater his irritation, at being thus foiled; but so assiduous were his inquiries, that he succeeded in discovering the route which the fair fugitive had taken, and by mid-day, he was already in close pursuit. The high-spirited Fernanda, however, was as determined not to be overtaken as she had been to fly from Barcelona; and with such speed as few but the express messengers of the Captain-General had ever attained before, she arrived, well-nigh fainting with exhaustion and fatigue, at the gates of her aunt's convent. We will not attempt to describe the amazement of the Lady Abbess, on beholding her niece, whom she had not seen for

many years, and whom she met at Palermo. We will not tell the sundry tales and conversations whispered about, during her sojourn among the worthy sisters, but will pass their propriety by an apology and unlooked-for. Suffice it to say, that nothing could exceed the hospitality of the welcome received, perhaps, her own to her much-required rest, in that sacred refuge.

She was not yet accused when the fiery De la Cerdà, in tracking the small part of the convent-door, authoritative, and an interview with him. He received, in answer, a letter that an appointment would be made. He would leave his address for the day, he was according to the Father Confessor, who on the following Sunday, Mother would have great use of him.

At the prescribed time for this audience, Don Luis was introduced into the parlour of the convent, where he found Fernanda and her aunt awaiting him. The Marquesa was first warned of his approach by that tremulous and unaccountable feeling of awe which his presence had never failed, of late, to awaken within her; but she succeeded so effectually in concealing her emotion, that the intrepid warrior, notwithstanding his habitual assurance, certainly appeared by far the most embarrassed of the three. After a few minutes of the most vague and general conversation which either party could devise, Doña Fernanda drew her kinsman aside, and addressed him thus:—

“Here is a letter, fair cousin, which bears my address, doubtless by mistake, but surely never can have been intended for me. I return it to you, as it is in your handwriting; and now, pray tell me if I may be so bold as to ask what your own plans may be?”

“Simply to stay here,” replied La Cerda, hastily, “until this singular and inexplicable mania of yours shall have passed away.”

"Then you must prepare for rather a long sojourn, during which I trust you will not take too much into account any diversion or solace which my poor company could impart. By the rules of this holy establishment, the visitors, as well as the sisters, are precluded from giving audience to any cavaliers, with the single exception of their brothers, oftener than once in a fortnight; and then, as in this case, the interview is invariably to take place in the presence of a third party, and not to exceed the space of one quarter of an hour. If agreeable to you, we will continue to meet on these terms: but how far wiser would it be that you should not forsake any longer, for such a purpose, all the far greater pleasures and far nobler pursuits which call you elsewhere! See, already the appointed time is fast expiring. Farewell, and do not forfeit your reputation for wisdom and for unfailing success, by following up a truly hopeless adventure. I would fain remember, with no other feeling than that of the deepest gratitude, our recent intercourse."

Ere the stern Castilian could offer any reply, or make any effort to detain her, Fernanda had glided from the apartment, closely followed by her aged relative. Infuriated at being thus baffled, he determined to leave no effort untried which could by any means induce the Marquesa to abandon her present purpose; but three successive letters having been returned to him unopened, no alternative remained for him, but to await the day on which he might again visit her. When that day came, he was again admitted, and found her, as before, in the company of the Lady Abbess. This time, however, Doña Fernanda afforded him no opportunity for conversing apart with her, and she even withdrew ere ten minutes had elapsed. De la Cerda, who had never thus been defeated before, had the patience to remain at Gerona, for one other interview, during which no more favourable incident having occurred, he determined upon proceeding, for a short time, to Madrid, where some friends, high in office, had repeatedly summoned him.

Great was the weight removed from Fer-

nanda's mind, when positive  
kinsman's departure. Even  
and sainted security of her  
had his image haunted her  
she shuddered at the thought  
accustomed to yield, so delicate  
stratagem of war, and in the end  
was still close at hand, by  
means of forcing upon her  
dresses, or of frustrating her  
And now that he had re-  
felt as if her victory were in  
she devoted herself, more  
more exclusively than before  
and duties of her new life.

Several weeks thus glided  
nanda was constantly her  
never had she been happier  
retreat, and that nothing  
tempt her to forsake the bliss  
to encounter the perils of  
treacherous expanse without  
the fair recluse so often sighing  
could the silent tear so often

tected on her pallid cheek? why would she gaze for hours upon the vacant sky, and upon the distant landscape, as if her heart were still far, far away from her lonely abode. Above all, why did one, now so thoroughly absorbed in religious avocations, and so utterly indifferent to the events of the outer world, so eagerly spring up when she was one day informed that an express had arrived for her from Barcelona? and why did she rush, in such frantic haste, to her chamber, that she might there peruse in solitude the letters which she thus received? Simply, gentle reader, because Palermo was not forgotten, and that these letters were from Palermo.

They were three in number. The first bore the splendid seal of the Vice-queen of Sicily; the second, the still more ancient and noble heraldic devices of the Colonnas. As to the third, it was a much smaller missive, and the signet affixed to it was as simple as might well be conceived: a heart of gules, surrounded by a sable badge, bearing the obscure, unknown motto, "*Bleeding for ever.*" This last

[illegible]

longed, is the earnest prayer, and I may add, the confident hope of my soul.

“You will doubtless have heard, ere this, that Castelnegro’s health has obliged him to throw up his command in Calabria, and that I have been appointed to replace him. The next account you will hear of me, will be such, with the blessing of Heaven, as will release you from any further apprehension as to my indiscretion; and then, Fernanda, perhaps I may be forgiven.”

Twice did the Marquesa peruse this letter, ere, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes, she opened the two which had accompanied it. The one, as we have already seen, was from the Princess Colonna, and it contained many details as to the recent events of the court, among which, Montalto’s slow recovery, his altered and dejected appearance, and his intended departure from Palermo, were summarily alluded to. The missive from the Vicequeen, though similar in substance to that of the Italian beauty, was written in a more

laconic and graver style, and concluded with a very earnest exhortation for Fernanda to return as soon as her affairs had been settled, now that every possible obstacle to her sojourn in Sicily had been removed.

This letter of the Duchess de San Lucar alone was communicated by Doña Fernanda to the worthy abbess, who testified the greatest alarm and regret, when she perceived that her young relative showed no extreme unwillingness to accept the Vice-queen's invitation. In vain did the venerable lady recall, in the most pathetic terms, all the perils and sorrows which had driven the Marquesa so eagerly to seek for the peace and seclusion of her present abode. In vain did she point out the awful risks to which her eternal welfare itself must be exposed, if she resumed the profane and godless pursuits of that licentious court, from which she had so recently been compelled to fly. Fernanda listened most deferentially to her aunt's solemn counsels, and assured her that she had no immediate intention of forsaking her maternal protection. On the very morrow,

however, the Marquesa's legal adviser, who had lately repaired to Gerona for the purpose of conferring with her, was hastily summoned, and desired by her distinctly to state for how much longer her presence would be required in Spain, to complete the arrangements which had been the original object of her return. This personage requested a few days' delay, competently to answer so unforeseen a question; but early in the ensuing week, he declared himself enabled to state, in accordance with letters just received, that if his fair and noble client would condescend to accompany him to her estates in Old Castile, and there to devote a fortnight exclusively to the matters which claimed her personal supervision, all might at the end of that time be placed upon the proper footing.

We will not attempt to follow Doña Fernanda and her sapient counsel into the details of their conversation, or of the still more intricate affairs which absorbed their whole attention for nearly three weeks after the Marquesa had taken a most affectionate fare-

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## CHAPTER XIII.

WARM indeed was the welcome which the fair Marquesa received, not only at the vice-regal residence, but from all her former friends and acquaintances. Surpassingly blessed were the tears which she shed on revisiting each familiar spot, to which her heart was bound by so many ties, and which each recalled moments of such pure and unforgotten rapture. And yet, was this indeed Palermo? Surely, the sky was wont to be more transparent, the sun brighter, the fair city itself more joyously to smile. Were they all altered, or was she herself no longer the same? And if something were

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Emmanuel the Great. The sudden appearance of this accomplished Princess, whose health certainly seemed rather the pretext than the cause of her voyage, was hailed by all classes with demonstrations of joy, amounting almost to enthusiasm. Nothing was now talked or thought of but festive meetings, pageants, and entertainments. One person alone appeared not to share in the general sentiment of satisfaction which this auspicious event had called forth, and that person was Doña Fernanda herself;—for, among the renowned warriors who swelled the gallant retinue of the royal daughter of Spain, she had from the very first hour discerned, with a faltering heart, her swarthy kinsman, Don Luis de la Cerda.

On the very day of his arrival, Don Luis had waited upon her, and, after the first formal compliments had been exchanged, the Marquesa could not conceal from him her desire of being informed of the circumstances which had led to his unforeseen return.

“I think, fair kinswoman,” replied La Cerda, “that, with a very slight effort of

memory, you might be enabled to conjecture my motive."

"I trust," said she, coldly, "that I should be entirely mistaken, were I to connect it in any way with what passed between us in Spain."

"No, by Heaven, you would not; and you may rest assured, that when I swore that I would dedicate my whole future life to you, I spoke in solemn earnest. He that would hesitate for one moment in following you, Fernanda, to the furthest extremity of the earth, would be worthy indeed of your contempt. Nay, you need not tremble so, and attempt to look thus sternly upon me. I intend no violence to your feelings, but I wish you to understand, that those which you have aroused within me are not such as one frown of your fair brow can dispel, or from which one womanly stratagem can escape."

"Don Luis," replied Fernanda, rising, her cheek as pale as death, and her voice tremulous with the same mysterious but unconquerable emotion, "I offered you my friendship,

and I offer it again, always upon one condition only—that you respect my wishes. I have no power of forbidding your residence in any spot which I may myself select, but I have already shown you that I can fully and completely interrupt our intercourse, should it become obnoxious to me, and I trust, that you will give me no cause for renewing the demonstration.”

The Marquesa could well observe the dark moustache of her kinsman quivering with resentment, as she thus addressed him. For the present, however, the desired effect was produced, as he solemnly assured her that he would be ruled entirely by her, and would strictly forbear from any further allusion to his sentiments, as long as he could believe the subject to be unwelcome to her.

Time flew swiftly by, amid the revelry in which the whole court was now almost unceasingly plunged, and La Cerda, though always at the side of his cousin, or intently watching her every look and gesture, strictly adhered to his engagement. But his ardent

and unremitting attentions could not but strike every beholder, and already an impression began to prevail, that, by dint of perseverance and energy of purpose, he would at length succeed, when an event occurred, which completely changed the nature of the speculations to which the lonely condition of the fascinating Fernanda not unnaturally gave rise.

One evening, a joyous throng of all the noblest and fairest in Palermo was assembled at the palace of the Princess Colonna, and the gorgeous festa was graced by the presence of the Portuguese Queen herself. Already the night was far advanced, but none had shown any disposition to retire, when, of a sudden, from without the walls of the garden, which surrounded the splendid mansion, the distant but fast approaching shouts of a thousand mingled voices were overheard.

"Is this some new wonder, with which your guests are to be surprised and delighted?" inquired the Viceroy of the fair mistress of the house.

"Not that I am in any way aware of," replied the Princess.

"Then I must send and ascertain what it can possibly be," rejoined the Duke; and one of his officers was immediately dismissed to obtain the desired information. He soon returned, and announced to the Viceroy that a vessel had just entered the harbour, bearing important intelligence from the seat of war in Calabria, and that the shouts had proceeded from a numerous crowd that was accompanying some messenger, apparently of high rank, who had landed with the despatches.

Having previously obtained Queen Maria's permission, and that of the Princess Colonna, the Duque de San Lucar desired that this personage should be brought to him; and soon afterwards, a young cavalier, in plain but martial attire, and bearing his right arm supported in a sling, was introduced to the festive circle assembled on the brightly illuminated terrace of the palazzo.

Doña Fernanda was at that moment engaged in deep conversation with the Queen.

halting, the brilliant crowd which surrounded them opened before them, as if by enchantment, and the Queen approached to greet the new-comer to her Majesty. For a moment the Queen's gaze remained fixed and motionless, as if she had beheld a spectre from beyond the grave; and then, staggering back, she leaned for support on the shoulder of Antonio, who had just driven near, and hastily uttering—"The heat—it has quite overpowered me," she reclined, insensible, in her rival's arms.

The stranger who had thus abruptly appeared, and whose eyes had met hers, for a moment only, was no other than the Prince di Montalto.

"What on earth shall we do?" whispered the Princess Colonna to a cavalier that was standing near her. "Fernanda would come on to-night, though she was very far from well—and this is the consequence. Just help me to support her, and we can draw her gently aside, while every one is engrossed with the Prince di Montalto's apparition."

Thus was the Marquesa removed to the private apartments of Antonia, who, being, notwithstanding her many faults, of a naturally kind disposition, did her utmost to conceal her friend's secrets; and so well was this accomplished, that the Duquesa de San Lucar was the only other lady present who clearly discerned and comprehended the incident.

In the meantime, Montalto had been led aside by the Viceroy, and had communicated to him the important and welcome intelligence of the complete suppression of the Calabrian revolt, after a general engagement, in which he had been himself wounded. This news the young Principe had, at first, determined to forward by express; but having been informed of the death of his aunt, he had altered his original purpose of proceeding to Venice, and had determined to return at once, though for a short time only, to his native city.

On the following day when, rested from the fatigues of his voyage, Montalto waited upon the Vice-queen, her very first question was,

whether he had not been gratified with his reception.

"More than I can say, madam," replied he. "I never saw my countrymen in better humour; but this I attribute principally to the good effects of your highness's rule."

"I fear that we may not accept this compliment, though we have done our best to deserve it," said the Vice-queen. "Yet I was not alluding to the multitude, who certainly cheered you most cordially, but to one individual, whose emotion was testified in another, though scarcely in a less flattering manner."

"Her Majesty, madam? I certainly ——"

"No, Signor, not the Queen. Come, come, you know well enough whom I mean."

"I protest, madam, that my ignorance is entirely unaffected."

"Indeed! Do you really wish me to believe that Queen Maria was the person who most engrossed your thoughts, when you joined us last night?"

"No, in truth, madam," said Montalto,

blushing deeply. "There certainly was a person there whom I did not expect so soon to see, though I had been informed, on landing, that she had returned to Palermo. But, alas! no sooner did she behold me, than she withdrew."

"Say, rather, that she was withdrawn; for, surely, you saw what occurred."

"I, madam! In truth, I saw nothing, saving that the Marquesa di Sierra Hermosa abruptly disappeared."

"Well, it is not for me to say what really took place: young cavaliers are already quite prone enough to be presumptuous, in these days. But I think you may rest assured that all is still right in that quarter; and I need not say how sincerely I rejoice that it should be so."

"Then God be praised!" exclaimed the ardent youth, his countenance glowing with the long-forgotten joy of former days. "Life has still an object for me."

"It has, indeed, if your heart is unchanged. But, though I am more confident than ever,

I must not disguise from you, that we have many obstacles still to overcome. During your absence, Don Luis de la Cerda has been unremitting in his attentions; and some persons here will have it, that, what by perseverance, what by terror, what by his devotedness to her in the hour of her greatest need, he has produced some impression upon Fernanda. I, myself, do not believe it. At all events, you must be very watchful."

"Alas, madam! Your highness was ever most kind, and far too partial on my account. But I fear that, after all that has occurred, there cannot, at best, be much hope left for me."

"There is none.—none whatsoever, Princess. If you yourself despair;—for, by mere presumption and energy of will, Don Luis will surely carry the day, should you hold back. But would I but persuade you to show a little more determination, and above all, a little more confidence, I should answer for everything that we have."

Thus the Viscountess and Montalto con-

tinued in deep and earnest conversation, and, finally, the Principe retired in a state of excitement and exultation with which his recent most successful military achievements had never for a moment inspired him.

As fortune would have it, on that very evening he attended a supper offered to him by many of his friends, and, we say it with regret, deep was the carouse which followed upon this joyous entertainment. Among the guests was the very cavalier who had assisted the Princess Colonna in bearing away the fainting Marquesa. So extremely transparent were the insinuations which this not very discreet personage threw out, under the influence of the genial wine cup, that Montalto's prospects were soon the general subject of the boisterous conversation, and wagers were freely offered, that, within two months, his rebellious mistress would be actually in his arms. We owe it to the Principe distinctly to state, that not only did he strenuously discourage this strain of conversation, but that, to mark his displeasure, he positively withdrew from the table

half an hour, at least, before the appointed time. Still, these most unbecoming prognostications of his friends were, as we shall see, not only freely circulated throughout the court on the subsequent days, but also, and most unjustly, attributed to him.

In the meantime, Doña Fernanda had, by the care of Antonia, been removed to her palace, there to deplore the untoward circumstances which had led to her so completely and publicly betraying the deep impression which Montalto's unforeseen re-appearance had produced upon her. But, if we are to credit Rosetta's account, though her mistress denied herself, during three whole days, to her friends, her countenance had not, for many months, borne such an expression of serenity and satisfaction as during that period.

At length, however, she felt herself obliged to see Don Luis, who had been most unfortunate for admittance during her short seclusion. As he appeared, Fernanda well saw, by the fire of his eye, and by the contraction of his brow, that he was in no usual state of

agitation; and no sooner were the first greetings exchanged, than he freely entered into the subject of his visitation.

"I am the more glad at seeing you so fully recovered, my fair cousin," said he, "that your indisposition has given rise to many commentaries, not very satisfactory for your friends."

"I wish that my friends could be induced to follow my example," replied Fernanda, hastily; "and to treat all the malicious slander propagated here with the contempt that it deserves."

"Such philosophy is not always attainable, nor indeed, perhaps, desirable," retorted La Cerda, rather sarcastically. "I, for one, consider that, both with women and with men, honour requires that we should be unimpeached, as well as unimpeachable."

"And pray, how is that to be insured?"

"Simply by making it as perilous to trifle with our names, as it would be impossible to tarnish them. But then we must ourselves be determined as to what we require."

"How do you mean? I hate circumlocutions."

"Not more devoutly than I abhor them. In plain Spanish, then, if you wish every beardless associate of young Montalto to declare about the town, that in two months you will be his, or, 'in his arms,' as they say, there is, of course, no use in my interfering. Otherwise, and if you yourself give no countenance to such ribaldry, I will answer for putting an early stop to it."

"I give countenance to it, Don Luis! You surely must have lost your senses."

"No, Fernanda; and God only grant that you have fully retained your own. At all events," continued he, with increasing warmth, "I must, and will, know distinctly, and without any further dallying, upon what footing you and this gallant really stand."

"What do you mean!" exclaimed Fernanda, now pale herself with unrestrained resentment. "Do you pretend to insinuate that I could, for one instant, stoop to deceiving you or any one else I am sure I have neglected

no effort to make you clearly understand upon what terms I desire our own intercourse to continue. I should like to know by what right you call upon me to account with you any further as to my feelings?"

"By what right?" cried the infuriated La Cerda; "by the first and clearest of all. I am your own appointed protector and champion. I have devoted my whole life to you, after having twice imperilled it in your quarrels. Do you think that I am now to be thrust aside at every caprice that may cross your fickle brain? No, Fernanda, by Heaven, you have mistaken me much if you have thought that I am thus to be trifled with. I have promised not indiscreetly to urge my suit upon you; but, by the sword of St. Iago, I swear that if any, were he my own brother, crosses my path, he dies—and perhaps not he only."

As he uttered these last words, with a voice and countenance more fearful than the threat itself, Don Luis seized the arm of his terrified mistress, and, unconsciously no doubt, pressed

it so forcibly in his own iron grasp, that she uttered a loud shriek of agony, and burst into tears. Nor was it from pain only that the Marquesa wept in that hour. An awful misgiving struck as cold as death upon her heart, and warned her that the same ominous intimation had been conveyed to her before, nearly in the self-same terms. Still, after having forsaken her for a moment, her pride soon recovered its full sway, and it burned with matchless splendour in her expanded eye when she thus addressed her impetuous suitor :—

“ You see this slight arm, Don Luis? It is so frail that it cannot bear your grasp for a second without revealing its own weakness by the dark blue circle that you can already trace around it. Well, this frail hand it supports may wither in your iron grasp, but it will never—never, I say, be joined to yours until the heart—the whole heart, goes with it. That heart, La Cerda, is not yours; and, mark my words, every base and unmanly threat with which you insult it raises it further and still further above your reach. Nor is this all:

as truly as I affirm that my heart is not yours, so truly do I vow that it is free—free as the pure air of Heaven. He to whom you have just alluded, and whose insolent prognostications, if he be indeed responsible for them, I utterly despise and defy,—he, I say, has, by the wanton offence that he has cast upon me, forfeited, long since, every claim to my regard. Beware, yourself, how you do likewise; for if by word, look, or deed, you testify the slightest doubt as to the entire truthfulness and sincerity of what I here affirm, remember that, from that hour, we two become perfect and absolute strangers. God knows that I have already suffered, through you, as much as one woman can be expected to forgive.”

“Through me, Fernanda!” replied Don Luis, not a little taken back at this frantic outburst. “However, it matters not, and I might have expected as much from one who is so little the mistress of her own feelings and purposes. When you are restored to a more rational mood, it will be time enough

for me to remind you that my services have not been always unsolicited. In the mean while, I will say no more, and will blithely, if you so will it, leave the world to form its own conjectures as to the recent most unfortunate incident."

"I do not know what you mean, and how the world, as you are always saying, can be called upon to obtrude itself into anything that may have recently occurred between you and me."

"Allow me to say, Fernanda, that you underestimate your own perspicacity. Surely you cannot think that the whole court have lost their eyes and senses, and can have allowed such an occurrence as we are both alluding to now, to remain unobserved?"

"What occurrence, I again say?"

"What occurrence! Why the magical effect produced upon you by the reappearance of that young Montalto."

"Well, indeed!" exclaimed Fernanda, in her most sarcastic tone, "it must be in mere mockery that the conceit of woman is talk d

of. Proud as you cavaliers are of your superior strength, you are not unfrequently, I conceive, exposed to pay some tribute to the weakness of the human frame; and yet I am not aware that we make it a practice to attribute the indispositions which so frequently deprive us of your society, merely to our own influence. We poor ladies, on the other hand, cannot suffer for an hour, from the most oppressive heat of Midsummer, from the coldest blast of winter, or from any inherent debility of our constitutions, but that every decently attired gallant must suppose that we are the wretched victims of his attractions. As for me, Don Luis, you may tell whoever it may concern to hear it, that when the weather is not quite so sultry as on Thursday last, I hope to be enabled to bear with the presence of any mortal being that you may imagine, without giving him cause to deplore the fatal effect of his appearance upon me."

"All this may be well enough," muttered La Cerda, very partially reassured by this declaration, "but I saw clearly what I beheld on

Thursday last, and am free, I suppose, to form my own conclusions upon it. Nothing can be further from my thoughts than to menace you in any way, as you seemed just now to suggest; but a warning is not a threat, and I think it fair, both by you and by others, to remind you, that I am fully on my guard, and that even you will not succeed in screening from my revenge whosoever shall justly awaken it. I have once spared Montalto's life, in consideration of his youth, but you may rest assured that he shall not long survive a second thrust from my sword."

"Now, by the Holy Virgin!" exclaimed Fernanda, "if you wish me never again to speak to you, nor again to brook, for an instant, your presence, you will renew that causeless and insane quarrel. The Principe di Montalto, since you needs must continually obtrude his name upon me, is, or must be henceforth, a stranger to you as well as to myself; and if, on the one hand, I shall not suffer him to renew his intercourse with me, I certainly will not on the other hand, --" w his

youth and inexperience to fall victims to your groundless and insulting jealousy. Remember that, Don Luis."

"And you call this indifference?" muttered the dark-browed La Cerda, fixing his lurid and ominous gaze on the expanded eye and tremulous form of Fernanda. "Why, every look and every gesture betrays your ill-dissembled concern for the fate of your beardless suitor. Do you think that I have not learned yet, that it is not in a woman's words that we are to read her feelings? Ay, you may rise up, and clench your hands, and gnash your teeth, and invoke every saint in the calendar—you will not mislead me; and if I had not long since known where to seek and where to strike, I should have learned it now."

What was the luckless Fernanda to do? Her high spirit, which had as yet inspired her with so dauntless a bearing during this most agitating interview, was now fast quailing before the implacable and vindictive incredulity of her dreaded kinsman. How she now deplored the hour when she had first claimed

his ill-omened intervention in her quarrel with Montalto? She could not conceal from herself that she had, from that day, given him some title to interfere in the most secret counsels of her heart, and now, how was she to act? Could she attempt to propitiate him, and thus encourage the very expectations she had so earnestly laboured to destroy? Was she, by her renewed and resolute defiance, again to provoke his relentless fury, and the awful consequences which it imported? Was she, by her silence, to sanction the ruthless designs which his words had but too clearly revealed; and yet, would not every endeavour that she could make to avert the impending conflict between her two rejected suitors, serve to confirm the jealous misgivings of La Cerda's distorted imagination? In this agonized perplexity the Marquesa's firmness at length entirely gave way, and she again burst into a paroxysm of mingled rage and grief.

Don Luis was bending over his bewildered kinswoman, endeavouring to turn to the best purpose the effect which he had evidently pro-

duced, when the doors of the apartment were suddenly thrown open, according to the etiquette of the times, before the Queen of Portugal, who, in company of the Duquesa de San Lucar, and a very select retinue, had called to inquire after the youthful Marquesa. Nothing could have been more unfortunate or ill-timed than this unexpected honour; but, happily for Fernanda in this instance at least, no cavalier in Europe was less exposed to lose his self-possession than the one whose society she was then enjoying. He bowed deeply to the Queen, and, in answer to her inquiring look, said—

“Your Majesty’s most gracious visit will be the more welcome to my afflicted kinswoman, that we were deploring, together, the sad loss of a deeply valued relative.”

“Indeed!” said Queen Maria, “Have you received the intelligence from Spain? I was not aware there had been any arrival for the last few days?”

“The news is not quite recent,” said the unabashed La Cerda, “but I thought it more

considerate to withhold it from Doña Fernanda during her late indisposition."

"I was not the least aware of this sad occurrence, my dear Marquesa," resumed the Queen, "or I would certainly not have intruded myself upon you at such an hour; but the blame rests partly with your attendants, who, with the most unimpeachable courtesy, would cast every door open before me, at my very first appearance."

"I trust your Majesty will be convinced," said Fernanda, now nearly restored to herself, "that at all hours your royal presence is as grateful to me, and to every daughter of Spain, as the sunbeam to the lonely prisoner."

After this and sundry other compliments in the style of the times, the conversation proceeded satisfactorily during a few minutes. But so soon as she could conveniently withdraw, Queen Maria arose, insisting upon retiring herself, and upon leaving Doña Inez to offer such consolation as her old and well-tryed friendship could afford to the afflicted Marquesa.

There are moments when even the most guarded and the most reserved among us, are irresistibly impelled to commune with those upon whose friendship and interest we have reason to depend, respecting the apprehensions or sorrows which fall to our lot; and it is an old and true saying, that grief is lightened as joy is increased, by sharing it. The solitary and secluded life which Fernanda had led from her earliest youth, had long accustomed her to concentrate within herself, with no ordinary resolution and constancy, those secret feelings which are not an unusual subject of intercourse and conversation among others of her sex and age. But on this occasion, she had been so fairly overpowered by her emotions during her ominous interview with La Cerda, and she felt so relieved when again alone with the solicitous and kind-hearted Duquesa, that she could not long withhold herself from imparting a portion, at least, of the sentiments which oppressed her. I need not say that the explanations which La Cerda had offered respecting his fair kinswoman's singular bearing at the

moment of Queen Maria's unexpected entrance, had scarcely been received by the Vice-queen as completely accurate; but the very discretion which she showed in manifesting no sort of doubt or misgiving upon the subject, had more effect in promoting a confidential disposition on the part of Fernanda, than could have been produced by any ill-advised marks of curiosity or of doubt.

When once determined upon no longer concealing from her powerful and faithful friend the forebodings which tortured her mind, Fernanda gave expression to them, in such eloquent and impassioned terms, that the Vice-queen was truly and deeply affected; and though not a word that fell from the Marquesa could justify Doña Inez in believing that she entertained for the Principe di Montalto any feelings saving those with which she might have been inspired by any other youthful cavalier whose life was imperilled on her account, the Duquesa could not but be deeply impressed with the very painful situation in which the unceasing and implacable jea-

lousy of La Cerda had placed his unfortunate cousin.

Nothing could exceed the kindness with which the Vice-queen entered into every particular, and the heartfelt earnestness with which she promised to use every endeavour to relieve her youthful friend from her not unfounded apprehensions. We shall see that she was not left long in doubt as to the best means of redeeming this pledge.

## CHAPTER XIV.

ON the evening of the very day which had been marked by the occurrences above related, the Duquesa di San Lucar was seated by Queen Maria, in the vice-regal barge, during a fishing excursion by torchlight, which had been ordered for her Majesty's special recreation.

"I wish I could discover," said the Queen, during a short interval of repose from the excitement of the sport, "for which relative Fernanda di Sierra Hermosa was so convulsively weeping when we broke in upon her this morning."

There was something in the tone and look

of the Queen, as she uttered this observation, which led Doña Inez to conjecture that her Majesty had not been much more satisfied than she had been herself, with the *éclaircissements* given by La Cerda. A smile of some meaning passed between them, after which the Queen resumed:—

“ I suppose you, *mi querida*, must have ascertained it during that long interview which I managed to secure for you?”

Again another smile was exchanged.

“ Your Majesty,” said the Vice-queen, after a moment’s silence, “ is, I believe, so kind as to honour Doña Fernanda with feelings of peculiar interest?”

“ Unquestionably. Her family was always considered by my father as among the most loyal and trustworthy of his court, and I have often seen her myself in former days, when she was a mere child, both at Toledo and at Madrid. There are few in whose welfare I have a sincerer concern.”

“ That gracious interest was, perhaps, never

more required than at present," said Doña Inez, thoughtfully.

"Indeed! What can be wanting to Fernanda? Has she not youth, beauty, wealth, and a host of admirers?"

"Well, madam, with all these advantages, there is no one, perhaps, in Palermo at present, more truly wretched than the Marquesa."

"You amaze me, my dear Duquesa; is there any indiscretion in inquiring what may be the cause of such an unaccountable state of mind in one so highly favoured?"

Having brought the conversation, as she had desired, to this very point, Doña Inez allowed herself to be betrayed into a short statement of the principal circumstances which had led to La Cerda's assuming his present baneful influence over the mind and destiny of Fernanda.

As none was, by taste, more conversant than Queen Maria with all the workings and mysteries of every species of intrigue, she listened with peculiar attention to each detail of the Vice-queen's narrative, which, we need

not say, presented the conduct of Fernanda under the most favourable aspect throughout. When the tale was concluded, she said—

“ If I have understood you right, my dear Duquesa, Fernanda does not care for the dark-visaged suitor who follows her everywhere like an ill-omened shadow?”

“ I think I can assure your Majesty that she has no other feelings for him than those of dread and aversion.”

“ And she is equally indifferent now to the addresses of young Montalto?”

“ So she declares, and, I believe, sincerely thinks herself,” answered the Duquesa; “ but I will not be equally affirmative on that head.”

“ You are right there, I suspect,” said the Queen. “ La Cerda may be the more dangerous swordsman, and the more experienced warrior; but your Montalto is certainly a very good-looking cavalier, and a most fitting occupant of a lady’s bower. I should not fancy him unaccustomed to prevail, when he is intent upon pleasing.”

“And yet, gracious madam, if he has failed here, he may certainly attribute the fault to himself.”

“So I had already gathered from what you have said,” resumed the Queen. “However that may be, the object now in view is to prevent the renewal of his quarrel with La Cerda—is it not?”

“No doubt, madam, and I much fear that neither will be very solicitous to avoid what may lead to a fresh encounter.”

“Then, my dear Duquesa, the sooner they are parted, the better. Let me see—for many obvious reasons, the Principe di Montalto cannot be called upon to leave Palermo—so La Cerda must go. If I am not mistaken, the discretionary power to remove any Spanish subject from Sicily rests with your husband?”

“It certainly does, madam, but I believe that the Duque would be very loth to use it against any person of Don Luis’s rank and station, saving upon the most serious political grounds.”

“Indeed, *mi querida*! Our Portuguese state officers are not yet grown so very scrupulous. Well, what would you say, then, to my requesting La Cerda to bear over for me, to Madrid, some important letters which I have to forward to my father. I can, at the same time, recommend him strongly to the King’s favour.”

“I make no doubt, madam, that Don Luis will be much flattered by this double distinction, but——”

“But what? my dear Doña Inez: surely his leading star is not Love, but Ambition. He cannot refuse to comply with the commands, or, if you will, with the request of a Spanish Infanta.”

“I trust not, indeed, madam, were he in his own sober mind—and yet I fear me that Don Luis has already been driven so nigh to distraction, by his rejected passion for his lovely cousin, that I cannot quite answer for what he may not do, or attempt, rather than be called away from her.”

“Well, we can only try. Reflect upon the

matter, consult your husband, if you please, and then dispose of me as you may think fit. Now, respecting young Montalto, in whose luckless suit I must own that I take some interest, you do not consider his case to be quite hopeless?"

"I do not indeed, madam. It appears to me that Fernanda has been, and still is, seriously offended with him, both on account of by-gone circumstances, and of some disrespectful expressions regarding herself, most unfairly, I believe, attributed to him, of late. Still, I cannot bring myself to think that this lover's quarrel of theirs is quite irreconcilable, particularly if Don Luis were out of the way. I state this, madam, as my own secret and private opinion, for if we were to listen to Fernanda, in her present mood, she thinks of nothing but of retiring to a convent for the rest of her days."

"A convent! She in a convent!" exclaimed the Queen. "Why, she must have lost her senses. Have you any mad doctor here, whom we can send to her?"

"We have, madam, but I am inclined to think, under your Majesty's pleasure, that some much younger physician's advice might prove no less efficacious."

"Ah, such a one as the Principe di Montalto, perhaps; but I fear me, from all you say, that your protégé is not overburdened with discretion."

"Perhaps not, indeed, madam; but his acquaintances are far more to blame than he is himself; and what is really unfortunate for him, is, that he has never been able to disconnect himself from a set of wild young friends, who have all his faults with few of his redeeming qualities. In this last affair, for instance, while Fernanda has taken it into her head that it was Montalto who publicly vowed that she should be his within two months, I have good reason to believe that this wager was laid, very much to his annoyance, between Ruffo and young Bedmar."

"What Bedmar?" said the Queen. "You surely don't mean my page?"

"The very same, under your Majesty's pleasure."

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"Yes, madam, with five days already spent."

"Oh, never mind the five days. I have heard all about the fainting fit, and within six weeks I hope to wear that pin."

"Your Majesty may rest assured that the day she will have a right to claim it, will be the happiest in my life."

A boat here approached the royal barge, to inform Queen Maria that a shoal of the finest tunny fish had been successfully driven into the innermost recesses of the gigantic nets which had been set for them. The conversation which we have just related, and in which many a courtier conceived that the complicated affairs of the whole of the Italian peninsula must have been disposed of, was thus suddenly brought to its conclusion.

Among the qualities which Maria of Spain had inherited from her illustrious father, and which so long secured to her the affections of her no less illustrious spouse, none was more conspicuous than her tenacity in furthering any object that she had in view; and having

now convinced herself, we scarcely know how or why, that the happiness of Fernanda depended upon her union with Montalto, she lost no time in prosecuting her endeavours to promote a consummation so desirable in her eyes.

## CHAPTER XV.

A CONSIDERABLE number of the younger members of both courts was assembled, on the evening of the subsequent day, at the vice-regal palacc, and there, for the first time since the night of his return, Montalto was destined to meet his relentless mistress. How gladly would he have addressed her, in terms of the most reserved and most respectful courtesy! but when she drew near, closely followed by La Cerda, her look was so cold and distant, that he could not summon sufficient courage to approach her. She passed, and no sign of recognition was exchanged between them. Oh! how the heart of the luckless Montalto throbbed,



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Montalto was immediately summoned, upon which the Queen said—

“ I wish you, Principe, to give me your hand for the second figure.

Montalto bowed low, in acknowledgment of the honour.

“ And as to this first,” continued Queen Maria, “ you must oblige me by completing it for us. I should desire to have the Marquesa de Sierra Hermosa opposite to me.”

We are willing to believe, that if, instead of this concise expression of the royal commands, Montalto had then heard his own death-warrant announced, the blood would scarcely have fled more suddenly or more completely from his cheek. But Queen Maria, apparently unconscious of the effect which her words had produced, was already engaged in a conversation with the Principe di Colonna, so that our hero's only resource was to appeal to the Vice-queen, who was close at hand.

“ I trust,” whispered he, “ that your highness will allow me to request your kind inter-

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There was no alterna  
 but to approach Diana.

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the honour of your highness's hand for this branle."

Her highness! never at any time had Montalto thus addressed her before, though this title was still sometimes given to her by strangers, and always by her attendants, in courteous commemoration of the exalted position which she had herself held at Palermo during the lifetime of her husband.

"Her Majesty's commands, however unaccountable, are not to be disputed by me," replied she, coldly; and she prepared to accompany the Principe, much to his relief.

The slight, fair hand was once more placed within his own. How its touch thrilled to the heart of Montalto, recalling those happy days when it had rested there, as a blessed earnest and promise of all the gifts it could convey; but now, alas! the unwilling and imprisoned guest bore with it no token, saving that of its own reluctance.

The solemn dance was commencing, but Fernanda seemed determined not to break the silence herself.

"Please not take the liberty of waiting upon me after your return," said Montala, at length in a tremulous voice.

"I did not expect that you would," coldly replied Fernando, who had just then encountered the eagle glance of La Cerda, fixed upon her with more than its wonted intensity.

Another pause ensued.

"Upon leaving Palermo," resumed Montala, "I ventured to address you, as I then thought fit for the last time. May I trust that, if my letter ever reached you, you will have forgiven my indiscretion?"

"I have had so much to forgive," answered de Marquis, "that that may well pass with me."

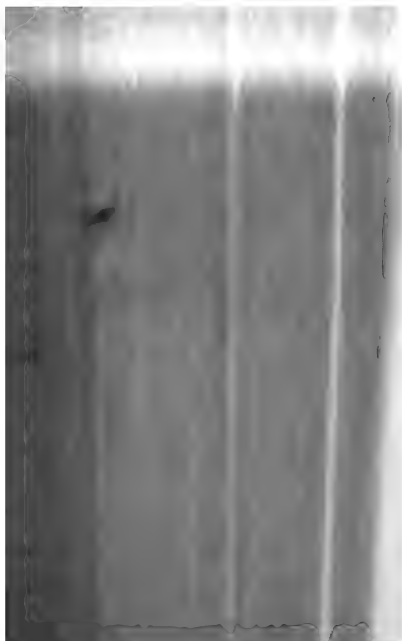
"May I hope, at least, that I said nothing therein that can have given you any fresh cause for displeasure?"

"Indeed, you must excuse," replied Fernando, "my not remembering what was in the letter, which was delivered to me with many others. I merely glanced at it, and, for what

I know, Rosetta may have lit my toilet tapers with it."

Well indeed might Fernanda claim indulgence in favour of her memory, for never had it more completely forsaken her than in that moment. Could the eye of Montalto have pierced the folds of mingled lace and brocade which enshrouded the fickle bosom of his mistress, he would have beheld there his farewell epistle ever resting close upon her heart. But ardent as was the gaze which he fixed upon his wayward partner, he could not detect that. Poor Montalto. In his youthful ardour he had considered this letter as a masterpiece of eloquence and of passion; but his heart was now so dispirited and humbled, that he could bear the sarcasms of his implacable mistress with a calmness and resignation that must have surprised even her.

"I have no doubt," resumed he, "that my letter met with the fate that it well deserved, nor would I have alluded to it to-day, were it not to excuse myself for having so poorly redeemed, as yet, the pledge which it conveyed.



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"None whatsoever, saving to exhort the republican merchants to make the best head they can against Louis of France."

"I shall convey to them your behest, and remember it well myself," returned Montalto. "The struggle will doubtless be arduous, but I shall, at least, not have to regret henceforth the cause in which my life will be adventured."

How strange and mysterious are the workings of the human mind! So long as Fernanda had read, in the suppliant eye and tremulous voice of her rejected lover, that her dominion was more firmly established than ever, she had repelled his respectful and earnest advances with the most sarcastic disdain. But now that it seemed to her as if his broken spirit were at length about to rebel against her uncalled-for and relentless severity—now that his voice had grown firmer, and his look more estranged, her own heart faltered, and her haughty glance was subdued in its turn. It was sad, besides, to reflect how one so young, and so highly favoured by

himself and by fortune—one who so lately had been redeemed, almost miraculously, from the cruel perils of war, was again driven to seek out the ruthless chances of the battle-field. Something of this sentiment Fernanda could not wisely conceal when, in answer to her lover's last observation, she said—

—I must again express my surprise that you should so very soon be disposed to engage once more in warlike enterprises. You were a poor speck truly, most severely wounded and stricken; and if I remember aright, you are now, on your return, still bound in a sling.

—It was slender; but I am now sufficiently recovered for the purpose I have in view.

—Well then, resumed Fernanda, whose eyes were again encountered the lowering glance of his. —God speed you, and send you an abundant harvest, who may recall you to your estates, and require less of her lover. The brave daughters of Spain are wont to answer as we lie. I suppose that you

will find it more convenient to go through Rome?"

"Yes, madam."

"Then, if you have no objection, I will intrust to your kind care a letter for my cousin Bianca Orsini. When do you say that you will start?"

"The day is not yet fixed, but I will not fail, Señora, with your permission, to apprize you of the exact date, when I shall have been enabled finally to determine upon it."

"I shall be grateful. And now that this eternal branle is over, pray lead me to my former place."

Thus did Montalto and his mistress part on that night, Queen Maria's stratagem having, as we need not state, succeeded in improving but very slightly the terms upon which they had previously stood. Indeed, though the incident led to a very unpleasant altercation between La Cerda and his fair kinswoman, it so little altered her bearing towards Montalto, that a cold and formal salutation was all that was exchanged between them whenever they accidentally met, during the ensuing month.



had but poor success. I trusted that I had at least got La Cerda out of the way, and I believe I have already told you, that when, some days ago, I mentioned to him my desire that he should bear some letters from me to my father, though not a little startled at my request, he expressed his readiness to comply with it. Well, do you know what happened last night? Just as my letters and the vessel were ready, Don Luis's surgeon comes to my chamberlain, and declares, that in consequence of a sudden and serious indisposition, La Cerda is unable to leave his room. I have ordered both the ship and the despatches to be kept back, but how long this delay is to last, God only knows."

"I fear me, madam, that Don Luis's health will scarcely be restored until Montalto shall himself have taken his departure for Venice."

"Well, at all events, my dear," replied Queen Maria, "La Cerda will be obliged to stay at home, and will be so far out of our way. Now, do you think that there is any

use in my speaking, either to young Montalto or to Fernanda herself?"

"Why, madam," answered Doña Inez, thoughtfully, "with respect to Montalto, I scarcely see what more your Majesty could require of him, for he is evidently as willing and anxious to be again at Fernanda's feet as we could possibly desire. As to her, though I make no doubt that your Majesty's commands would have much weight with her, yet I am bound to say, that when I, a very few days since, alluded, with her, to the Principe's dejected bearing and apparently unaltered feelings, she so positively declared that she would rather return to her convent in Spain than again accept his addresses, that I was obliged to drop the subject, for fear of driving her to some imprudent step."

"Then what is to be done?" said the Queen.

"I see but one hope, madam; that is, to bring them together as much as we can, and thus call the voice of nature to our assistance."

“ We have been doing little else, Heaven knows, for the last month,” replied the Queen; “ but I suppose our best chance is to persevere. What would you say to another fishing-party, for which I could invite them both to come to our barge, with no other company than ourselves?”

“ Nothing could be better devised, madam; and I will, if your Majesty pleases, convey your gracious commands to both parties.”

Thus it was that Montalto and the Marquesa were seated close by each other in the vice-regal barge, on one of the loveliest evenings that ever blessed the fortunate shores of Sicily. But Fernanda, having now convinced herself, as she had for some time suspected, that there was a design on the part, either of Queen Maria, or of Doña Inez, or of both, to betray her into committing herself with Montalto, beyond her present wishes or inclinations, determined upon showing herself more forbidding and distant than ever towards her luckless suitor, whom she very unjustly conceived to be also leagued against her.

When she had at first approached the barge, and became aware that the Principe was to be of the party, she had been on the very point of withdrawing; but, happily, her deference for the Queen prevailed over her reluctance to comply with her commands. Still, the unfortunate Montalto's proffered hand was declined, as she lightly stepped into the fairy vessel, and there, her back was so sedulously turned to him, that it was long before he could find means to address her. When, after a long pause, he ventured to express a favourable opinion of the weather—that blessed and eternal subject for failing conversation—she declared that she found it intolerably oppressive; when, in the utmost excitement of the sport, he called her attention to the struggles of the gigantic captives, she avowed her bad taste, in particularly disliking that species of pastime: in short, so hopeless were all his efforts to provoke the faintest smile on her part, that, at last, his patience gave way, and a long interval of silence ensued.

Queen Maria, who had well observed what

was occurring, now saw that it was absolutely necessary for her to come to the rescue.

“It is most singular,” said she, “that now-a-days, in every party of pleasure, the youngest members are always the gloomiest, and the hardest to amuse. As for you, Fernanda, you must have lost a host of your Spanish relatives since the one whose fate you were so wildly deploring when I saw you at your house, for you look now, if possible, even sadder than then.”

The Marquesa was annoyed at this observation, and her irritation was not wholly concealed in her voice and manner, when she replied—

“Your Majesty is, doubtless, not aware that circumstances have unfortunately occurred, which render our society mutually irksome and disagreeable to the Principe di Montalto and to myself.”

Queen Maria was on the point of replying, in the same tone, that, even had she been aware that such a feeling existed, she would scarcely have expected it to be thus paraded

in her presence; but, conquering her slight and transient feeling of displeasure, she merely expressed her regret at the ignorance which she had betrayed, and desired that the boat should immediately return to the shore.

Fernanda uttered a few words of apology to her royal friend, as she kissed her hand, on taking leave of her; and the Principe, more disheartened than ever at the occurrences of the evening, started early next morning for the castle of Montalto, there to make, in all haste, the necessary arrangements previous to his departure for Venice. We shall see that these untoward incidents, which might well have discouraged a less enterprising spirit than Queen Maria's, tended merely to stimulate an increasing energy on her part, in prosecuting the end she had in view.

## CHAPTER XVI.

THE day was not very far advanced when Montalto reached the splendid country residence of his family, which was now become his own, by the recent death of his aunt. This venerable lady, herself a descendant of the illustrious house of Doria, had, for many years, taken up her abode exclusively in this place, and had converted into a noble palace what had formerly been merely a handsome hunting villa of her husband's family. Though her health, during the latter years of her life, had precluded her return to Italy, she had never ceased to cherish feelings of the strongest attachment for her native land, and for every

thing that could recall the splendours of Genoa and of Rome, which two fair cities had been the alternate home of her younger days. Her princely dowry had thus been almost entirely spent in enlarging and decorating, according to the gorgeous taste of the age, her chosen abode; and while many inferior artists, among the pupils of Michael Angelo and the competitors of Raffaele, had been sent for by her, to contribute, under her immediate supervision, to these costly works,—several of the masterpieces of the Italian arts, just then breaking into their splendid meridian, had been ordered or purchased, expressly by her, in the far-famed Peninsula.

Montalto had not visited this palace, for, as we have already said, the villa could now bear no other name, since the day when he had bid there farewell to his kind-hearted and venerated relative, upon his departure for Calabria. But, sad as were the recollections which were evoked by the memory of one whom he had ever tenderly loved, and who had been as a parent to his orphaned childhood, he could not

withhold a glance of admiration from the princely abode which now claimed him as its lord. So engrossed had he been, at first by the pleasures and pastimes of his age, and latterly by his hopeless suit and the sterner avocations which it had urged him to pursue, that scarcely ever had his mind dwelt upon the thought that all the treasures around him were to be one day his own. And now, as he wandered, through the stately and deserted halls, into the fantastic yet beautiful gardens, which extended their gorgeous carpeting of variegated flowers along the massive terraces, gloomily indeed did he reflect upon the sad chances which were even now driving the inheritor of this earthly paradise to fly, like a proscribed exile, from its allurements into the sternest enterprises of a far distant warfare. Yet how could it be otherwise?

“Had I never seen and never known her,” muttered he to himself, “had the witchcraft of her resistless eye never torn from my distracted soul its peace and its rest, how happily would my life have glided on here, among the cherished

scenes of my childhood, and surrounded by all that art can imagine or create, and all that wealth can bestow for the happiness of man! But, alas, there is no repose for me now! All I could behold here in this residence, that seems prepared, as by some fairy hand, for the chosen bride of my heart, would but exasperate the demon that is within me, whose voice is ever recalling all that I have forfeited, all that I have lost. Yes, Fernanda, that chamber, which would have been thy resting-place—these halls, which thy beauty would have adorned, oh, how far more than their costliest ornaments!—these gardens, where we would have strayed together in the blessed communion of our hearts, shall not long witness the fatal bereavement which they seem themselves to share. Whatever may be my fate elsewhere, I feel that I cannot rest here.”

Such was the train of sentiments which engrossed the heart-stricken Montalto on that first evening, and they were confirmed more and more by subsequent experience and reflection during each successive day.

A week had thus elapsed, and the arrangements which the Principe had in view were nearly completed, when, late one afternoon, he was informed that a strange cavalier, who appeared to have ridden fast and far, was desirous of seeing him forthwith. Great was his astonishment, when, on moving hastily forward to meet this personage, he beheld the Marquez da Souza, the chief equerry of the Queen of Portugal.

"I trust that you will excuse this abrupt intrusion," exclaimed the Marquez, "but I come, on the part of her Majesty, to claim your hospitality for herself and her retinue during the forthcoming night."

"My poor house will assuredly be honoured far beyond its deserts, by Queen Maria's most gracious condescension," replied the astonished Montalto; "but allow me to ask, how it is possible that she should be in this neighbourhood?"

"Her Majesty was induced to join a hunting party, prepared for her diversion by the Conte di San Lorenzo," replied the new comer;

“but, in the excitement of the chase, she, and a few of her more ardent followers, were led so far away, as to find themselves in those remotewoods of yours to the left. Having there ascertained that she was on your property, and not very far from your house, she determined upon requesting you to give her shelter here for the night, the more so, that she is already very much fatigued.”

“I am flattered more than words can express,” answered Montalto; “and if you will but allow me to give a few directions to the small household that I have here at present, I will go forth with you immediately, to meet and welcome her Majesty.”

It was fortunate for the Principe, that, out of respect for the memory of his deceased aunt, he had provisionally retained the whole of her former establishment; and though great indeed was the perturbation caused among these most worthy, but rather antiquated attendants, by the sudden arrival of a royal personage amongst them, such preparations were in time made as could hardly have been

expected in the house of a youthful and unmarried cavalier. Scarcely, however, had the most indispensable orders been given, when Montalto was informed that her Majesty and her suite, whose progress had been accelerated by the threatening aspect of the weather, were even now alighting from their horses, at the bottom of the noble flight of marble steps which led to the outer vestibule.

As soon as he beheld Queen Maria, Montalto gracefully, and with bended knee, raised to his lips the royal hand which was extended to him; but scarcely had he had time to cast one glance upon her Majesty's attendants, than he was observed to rest for support, as pale as death itself, against the neighbouring pillar. In the midst of that small retinue, the young Principe had discerned the Marquesa di Sierra Hermosa, standing close behind the Queen, with a countenance as lowering as the stormy sky above them.

"I am come with a singular court," exclaimed Queen Maria, affecting not to notice

her host's emotion. "I have managed to out-ride all my own suite, with the exception of young Bedmar and La Souza; and had it not been for the indefatigable devotion of the Principessa di Colonna, and of Fernanda de Sierra Hermosa, who never consented to leave my side, I should have been wandering in your woods, or trespassing upon your hospitality, without a single female attendant. We were all, I can assure you, most unwilling thus to intrude upon you, but I trust, from what La Souza has already reported to me, that none of us will be unwelcome, though unbidden, guests here, for one night only."

"Most assuredly not, madam," replied the Principe, who could not but remark the tone in which Queen Maria had uttered the last few words; and then, according to the custom of the age, he stepped forward to salute, in token of hospitable welcome, his two fair guests. The Principessa Antonia lent her blooming cheek with such good grace to the ceremony, that it was performed with the rapidity of thought itself. But when the

youthful host approached, in turn, the retiring Fernanda, so unconquerable were the sentiments of respect and of awe, which overpowered him, that he would have scarcely mustered strength or courage to press the hand of his mistress, had not the Queen exclaimed—

“Nay, but Fernanda, all past differences should be forgotten here—at least for to-night.”

At this gentle reproof, the haughty Marquesa raised first her eyes, then her face, and Montalto's lips rested, for a second, on a straggling lock of her fair and unrivalled hair.

“And now, gentle sir,” continued the Queen, “if you will allow us poor ladies to retire, for a few moments, to any private room, where we may adjust our dresses, our next requirment will be the charity of a little refreshment; for I believe that I am speaking collectively and not regally, when I say that we are actually fainting for want of food.”

No time was lost in making every hasty

addition that could be devised to the evening repast originally prepared for the Principe. Thus, with the shortest possible delay, and all form and ceremonial being waved by the Queen's especial order, the three fair ladies and their two cavaliers were seated at a tolerably well appointed board, while young Bedmar, standing behind the seat of his royal mistress, attended personally upon her in that courtly and honourable service which his gentle blood entitled him to perform.

"How excellent is that *Lacrima Christi*, Principe," said La Souza, a high authority upon such matters.

"I believe it is reckoned so," replied Montalto, "and I only wish the kitchen could do its duty to-night no worse than the cellar, in which I have heard that my lamented aunt's father-confessor took a peculiar and very beneficent interest. However, her Majesty must kindly endeavour to fancy herself still in the woods, and enjoying the primitive and much recommended fare of our forefathers, under the shade of the parent oak tree."

"It would require more imagination than I possess," replied the Queen, "to conjure up such an illusion. Our repast, Principe, is worthy of the halls in which it is served, and which, to my poor Portuguese eyes, appear the most splendidly and tastefully decorated that I have ever seen. Indeed, if I kept you waiting just now longer than I had intended, the blame must rest with those noble pictures in the next room, from which I could not withdraw my eyes. There is a 'Holy Virgin and Child,' more beautiful than anything I had conceived it possible for art to produce. I should much like to know the name of the painter."

"I am ashamed to say, madam," replied Montalto, "that I do not know it myself, although I have remarked the picture. I suppose, however, it may be by that young painter from Urbino, whose reputation is now so great at Rome."

"I would wager much that it is by Raffaele," said the Principessa Colonna; "and though it is after his earlier manner, it appears to me

inferior to none of his works which I saw when I was last in Rome. There is also, if I am not much mistaken, a 'Christ,' by young Domenichino, worthy of the Caracci themselves. I suppose, Principe, that, with the help of Fernanda, who is more of an artist than myself, I must explain to you your whole gallery this evening, which you should really learn to appreciate."

"It will be an excellent occupation," said the Queen, "and we must certainly spare no pains for his instruction, if we can thus requit his most welcome hospitality. It is quite wonderful how my strength is already recruited, and I feel almost as if I could again encounter the fatigues of the day. What say you, Fernanda? Are you prepared to take the field again, and join in the sports of the chase?"

"Your Majesty will kindly remember that the pleasures of the chase were not my object and that her express request alone induced me to join her party to-day. For the same motive, I am still as ready as ever to follow her."

"I must say," resumed the Queen, "that you are indeed a true Medina Sidonia. None but you, I believe, could have made that jaded palfrey of yours keep so close to my elbow during the latter part of the day, and I shall never forget the indignation you showed when we first determined upon claiming some shelter in this neighbourhood, instead of returning to Palermo. Why, we should have scarcely reached it to-night, Principe, I should think?"

"The distance, madam, is about seven leagues; and your Majesty can barely have ridden less than twenty to-day, as it is."

"Why, I must tell you, Principe, that our litters took us as far as the Conte di San Lorenzo's villa, from whence we started for the chace, which we were so successful as to lose within an hour. And, by the bye, would it be very inconvenient for you to send a messenger to the Conte, to apprise him of our safety? He was so good as to make all the arrangements for to-day at my express desire, and I much fear that our sudden disappear-

ance will have caused him some annoyance and anxiety."

"I will wager———" exclaimed young Bedmar."

"Let us have none of your wagers here, fair sir," said the Queen, abruptly, to her youthful attendant; "or I shall have to send you on this errand yourself."

At this playful reproof, the page coloured deeply, nor would his confusion alone have been remarked, perchance, if the Principessa di Colonna had not burst into a fit of laughter so immoderate as to claim the undivided attention and solicitude of the company.

## CHAPTER XVII.

JEST now followed jest in quick succession, and so contagious were the convivial feelings of the company, that at length Fernanda herself joined as heartily in the animated and joyous conversation as if she had never known care, sorrow, or resentment. And, indeed, what heart could have long withstood the influence of such deep and earnest devotion as that which was manifested in Montalto's look and manner during the whole evening? Never had an Infanta of Spain, nor the Sovereign of an illustrious kingdom, been received with more studied and deferential courtesy, than was shown on this occasion to Queen Maria.

by her youthful host. But what was the utmost respect and attention which he testified to his royal guest, compared to the tremulous and suppliant anxiety with which he would watch every look of Fernanda, as if there to divine how he could conform to her most secret wishes, or spare her the slightest motive for the embarrassment she might not unnaturally have felt under such singular circumstances.

When the glad repast had been concluded, the eyes of Queen Maria having fallen upon a guitar, which lay in a remote corner of the hall, she desired her page, who was a good musician, to tune the long-neglected instrument, and to sing one of the romances of her native land, which she so much loved to hear. A second was called for, and then a third, after which Fernanda and the Italian beauty, who were both accomplished mistresses of the noble art, were induced to give some specimens of their skill. The pleasures of the evening were then concluded, we lament to say, by such games of cards and of hazard as were at

that time most popular in either Peninsula, so that the clock of the castle had long since proclaimed the midnight hour when Queen Maria arose to retire to rest.

The sleeping cup was presented to her by Montalto, in a splendid salver of pure gold, while young Bedmar was requested by him to perform the same ceremony in respect to the other two noble ladies. But the address displayed by the page was not equal to his alacrity, for, as Fernanda was raising the silver vase to her lips, so absorbed was he, perchance, in the contemplation of the beautiful being before him, that the cup, when returned to him, slipped from his hand, and its contents flowed upon the costly riding attire of the Marquesa.

"Bravo, Bedmar!" cried the Principe; "you are, indeed, a trusty cup-bearer. Now, fair ladies, what shall we do to the culprit?"

"For my part, I abandon him to Fernanda's jurisdiction," exclaimed Queen Maria; upon which the Marquesa, enclosing in her fairy fingers one of the delinquent's raven locks,

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It would scarcely be becoming for us to inquire what occurred during the very animated conversation which then took place between the Queen and her host, though we shall shortly have an opportunity of surmising pretty accurately the substance of their discourse. We only know positively, that, in conclusion, the Principe kissed the royal hand with singular earnestness; and that her Majesty assured him that she would not long detain the Marquesa, whom, as a gallant and dutiful host, he would, doubtless, wish himself to conduct, as well as the Principessa di Colonna, to their respective apartments.

"Well, my dear child," said Queen Maria, to her lovely attendant, when left alone with her, "you really have behaved admirably to-night! I should almost think that you have, at last, forgiven me, for having been the very involuntary cause of this singular rencontre."

"If your Majesty's share in the matter has been quite involuntary, I have nothing to forgive," replied the smiling Fernanda.

"Well, then, don't pull my hair quite so

tight; I should almost think that you were taking it for young Bedmar's, whom, by the way, you certainly punished to the full amount of his misconduct."

"I most humbly crave your Majesty's pardon: I fear me that I am a very poor toilet woman. But as to young Bedmar, his royal mistress is, doubtless, aware that I had more than my riding-dress to avenge."

"Indeed! Pray, tell me how any one of my followers can have incurred your displeasure?"

"Your Majesty's allusion to wagers, to-night, leads me to believe that you cannot be wholly ignorant of my grievance. All Palermo has sufficiently rung with it, God knows."

"Well, then, I may as well admit," replied the Queen, "that I did hear something about a foolish wager, attributed to that boy, which I thought very unwarrantable on his part; though, after all," continued she, scarcely repressing a smile, "why should he not win it?"

"Why, madam? Well, indeed, I am much beholden to your Majesty, for your good opinion of your humble servant."

"My good opinion of you is such, my dear Fernanda, that I cannot bring myself to think that you can for ever remain insensible to the advances of such a lover as Montalto. He really is, without any exception, the best looking cavalier that I have ever seen—at least," added she in a lower voice, "since I left Madrid."

"There is not much fault to find with his looks, madam, to be sure," said Fernanda, hastily, "and a great pity it is that the face should be so faithless an image of the heart."

"Well, but the heart! my dear Fernanda; you surely must not complain too bitterly of what is so clearly yours."

"Mine, madam! Had it been mine in truth, would it ever have stooped publicly to insult and revile her to whom it was, or pretended to be, devoted? Your Majesty can scarcely be aware of all that has occurred between the Principe and me. But there are injuries which Spanish blood will not brook,

and these shall be avenged to the last, even if my life were to pay the forfeit. Your Majesty has seen to-night, that, however painful the trial may have been to me, I could repress, out of respect for you, the sentiments which well-nigh overpowered me when I crossed the threshold of this house. But the Principe di Montalto and his abettors are much mistaken if they think, that when I have been offended, I am thus to be reclaimed."

"Well, my dear," said the Queen, now fully aware that the conversation was scarcely tending to promote the object she had in view, "no one can dream of forcing you to be happy against your inclination, so you need not look so very indignant and alarmed, and suspicious of your best friends."

"No such feeling has crossed my heart, I humbly assure your Majesty," replied Fernanda; "the kindness you have ever shown me I can never forget, and I trust that I have not erred in thus imparting to you, apparently at your own instigation, the real state of my mind."

"Erred!" exclaimed the Queen. "Not at all—I am, on the contrary, most grateful for your confidence. Now, good night, my dearest Fernanda, with many, many thanks, and do not think yourself obliged to quarrel with your pillow because it belongs to this unfortunate Principe."

When the Marquesa returned to the withdrawing-room, where she had left the Principessa di Colonna, she found her in close conversation with Montalto, who proposed one more game at hazard, which, however, was declined by both ladies, upon the plea of extreme fatigue.

"Then I suppose I must beg leave to conduct you to your apartments," said the Principe.

"I shall be much beholden to you," replied Antonia, "and am ready to accompany you forthwith, as I am sure that mine comes first."

"Nay, but with your leave, carina," said the Marquesa, "we will go to mine first, as I am quite worn out, and the Principe can afterwards escort you to yours."

"Well," answered the smiling Antonia, "it

really is hard that my reputation should thus be imperilled, because you all of a sudden find yourself so overpowered with sleep. Remember that I have had no quarrel with the Principe, and cannot therefore remain alone with him, without some danger to my fair fame."

"Each of us had better take care of our own," replied Fernanda, rather sharply.

"Come, don't be angry," resumed the incorrigible Antonia; "I only wished to remind you that you are responsible for all that may occur between the Principe and me."

"Neither of you are accountable to me, that I am aware of," answered Fernanda, in the same tone, and she moved towards the door, closely followed by her host.

The luckless Montalto was sorely dispirited, when obliged to relinquish the hope which he had cherished during the whole evening, of remaining, were it but for a few minutes, in the presence of his mistress alone. But Antonia having, with becoming discretion, stayed rather behind, he found means to whisper into the Marquesa's ear, his earnest hope that no-

thing had occurred that day, so far as he was himself concerned, that could have given her the slightest annoyance or umbrage.

"Nothing, indeed," replied she, moved, in spite of herself, by this humble and heartfelt appeal, "and I trust that I too have succeeded in avoiding anything that could have given you pain."

"You have, indeed," answered Montalto. "As far as was in your power, you have veiled the charm of your beauty; and even in the midst of the tortures which it still unwillingly and unconsciously inflicts, I feel that I should be grateful for this mercy."

"When do you leave Sicily?" resumed, after a moment's silence, the Marquesa, anxious to change the tone of the conversation. "I suppose that I shall see you once before you go. You remember that I have a commission for you to execute."

"Undoubtedly, and if you will allow me to wait upon you, and receive your orders, I will regulate my departure according to them."

"Not so, I pray you," said Fernanda, has-

tily. "I have nothing to request or to say which could in any way affect your own plans."

Antonia here came up, and after dilating upon the bolts and bars with which the apartment was plentifully supplied, in such a tone as almost to provoke a renewed expression of her friend's displeasure, she at length retired with their common host.

And now they were gone; now Fernanda, was alone; now at length the searching glance of idle curiosity, or of unbidden interest, was no longer rivetted upon her. The awful struggle of that night—the struggle of the heart against itself, was over, and she had triumphed. No unrepressed word, no unguarded look, had borne the slightest testimony to those around of the dread conflict which was raging within, and the victory was complete; but alas, what a victory! She thought of Montalto's impassioned gaze, of the earnest and tremulous deference of his suppliant manner—how she had trampled again upon that fallen spirit, and reviled that all-devoted love. She remembered how her very

last words had requited, with a fresh wound, the anxious and heart-proffered hospitality of that evening; and then, all her pride forsook her, and she burst into an agony of grief. Yes, gentle reader, the haughty Marquesa wept in that hour over the absent Montalto, as she had wept once before, by his bed of sickness; but the agonized tears of her remorse brought no consolation to him for whom they were shed!

In the meantime, the Principe, all unconscious of this sudden revulsion, and brooding sadly over the ominous and hopeless farewell conveyed in the last words of Fernanda, was escorting to her chamber the blooming Antonia, who, if she had had any reason to dread this short interval, must now have been fully reassured. Indeed, she could not but notice the deep and sullen dejection which sat upon her companion's brow.

"Well, I am sure, Signor," exclaimed she, "it is no fault of mine if matters have not been arranged in a more satisfactory manner. You will allow that I did my utmost to secure for you a more interesting conclusion to the pleasures of the evening."

"You remind me, fair madam," replied Montalto, "that I am a sadly uncourteous host, and altogether unworthy of the happiness that fortune has bestowed upon me to-night. But you must consider me in the light of one of those luckless beings whom Heaven has deprived of their reason, and who gaze in impotent and idiotic abstraction upon the noblest marvels of the creation."

"This is an awful illness, indeed," said Antonia, "and yet I should not fancy it quite immedicable."

"Alas! one of its most alarming symptoms is that it rejects all cure."

"By whomsoever proffered?"

"Nay, fair lady, but from all who will offer it."

"Well, but they who will not vouchsafe their compassion now, may be induced to come forward later. Many who will jest at a slight suffering, will be moved when the evil is more serious and more intense."

"When all is over, they will be moved, perchance; but how often death is required to

bear witness to disease! However, this is a sad subject for the thoughts of your light heart to dwell upon. Here are your rooms, where, I trust, dreams are awaiting you, less gloomy than this our parting conversation. You will excuse my having brought you so far, but I have one apartment only, in the neighbourhood of Queen Maria, that I could have offered to you, and she appeared to wish that it should be occupied by the Marquesa."

"Surely, Principe, this lovely suite requires no apology, and I shall be tempted to believe that I am myself a queen when I survey it. Now, my gentle host, good night, and may your own dreams be fairer than your present thoughts."

Montalto kissed the slight hand which was placed within his own, and then retired to his solitary chamber.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

WE must now return to Fernanda, whom we so lately left in a frame of mind scarcely more enviable than that of her heart-stricken host. Long did her tears flow unrepressed; but overpowered at length, by all the exertions and emotion of the day, she prepared to retire to her rest.

The apartment which had been selected for her was situated on the first floor of the palazzo, and corresponded exactly with that which had been assigned, on the ground floor, to the Queen of Portugal. It consisted of one smaller and two larger rooms, that had latterly been occupied by the deceased Principessa herself, and which, with the staircase that led to

them, formed the whole wing of the building on that side.

After a few hasty glances at the precious works of art, and at the noble pictures which decorated the apartment, Fernanda drew, with great care, the costly but massive bolts which secured, first the door of the outer chamber, then that of her own room; and still musing sadly upon the singular chance which had brought her as a guest under the Principe di Montalto's roof, she retired to her couch and resigned herself to her gentle slumbers. At first they were so sound as to plunge her into a state of complete unconsciousness; but soon the train of thoughts which had absorbed her, ere she had sunk to sleep, seemed to recur to her mind, no longer linked with their former precision, but breaking upon her in vague and unconnected visions. She fancied that she was again with Montalto, attempting to dissuade him from his purpose of assuming the command of the expedition to Calabria; but now his determination was inflexible—his last farewell was uttered, and he was gone. Again the scene was changed.

She was seated in the gorgeous vice-regal stand, by the lists of Palermo, and Montalto had taken the field against the redoubted La Cerda. He was slowly riding past her, but his arm was confined in a sling, and, as their eyes met, how thrilling was the look of reproach which he cast upon her! The trumpets were sounding the challenge, the knights were at their posts—the fatal “*Laissez aller*” hung upon the lips of the *poursuivants*. But now a murmur of alarm ran through the glittering throng around her, and blank dismay spread over every countenance. The lists were on fire; dark columns of stifling smoke were arising on all sides, and soon the flaming eddies stretched to the very pillars which supported the frail edifice. In an agony of dismay, the affrighted Fernanda shrieked aloud, and sprang from her couch.

But the terrors which had beset her pillow were not allayed when the ghastly slumbers which had first aroused them were dispelled—her apartment was full of smoke. Already the awful murmur of the victorious element below

could be distinctly heard; the spiral flames could already be seen rising as high as the window to which she had rushed, and already the pure air of heaven itself seemed to glow with the deadly breath of the Destroyer.

The Marquesa ran from her bed-chamber to the adjoining room, but there, with an awful crash, more than one gilded shutter was already giving way, and the fiery crests of the devouring element were waving in triumph along the silken curtains, and rising to the very summit of the vaulted ceiling. Still she moved on, in the hope that she might reach the outer door; but ere her trembling hands could find the fatal bolt, a fresh column of the thickest smoke burst, with the fury of the whirlwind, through the neighbouring window, and bore her heavily to the ground. She rose, and screamed wildly for help, but what was that frail cry to the giant roar of the Conflagration, as it now darted all unobstructed upon its prey!

“O, Santa Maria,” groaned the ill-fated Marquesa, “that I should be left to die thus, and alone.”

Whose voice was that which seemed to drive back the Demon of Destruction, as it exclaimed?—

“Fernanda—for Heaven’s sake, open the door—your life is in danger!”

“Montalto, dear, best-beloved Montalto!—save me, or I die. I cannot undo that bolt—I cannot breathe away from this single window. Force the door open, as you hope for God’s mercy!”

Loud voices were now heard without on the staircase, then the thundering of the axe and of the crow-bar, upon the closely-bolted door, until it was wrenched away by main force.

“Stand back,” cried Montalto, as he sprang through the dark curtain of vapour which, with its fiery fringe, seemed now to encircle the whole room. “Stand back, and let none but me approach her. Fernanda, where are you?”

“Here, Montalto! my preserver, my defender, here!”

“Tremble no more, my angel, my life,” whispered he, as, seizing her in his arms, he

bore her to the staircase. "There is no danger now—there is no danger here. Throw this cloak around you, and I will bear you far away from this burning atmosphere."

In the meantime, the raging flames had swept round the whole of the wing lately occupied by the Queen of Portugal and by Fernanda, and were spreading fast to the main body of the building, which contained all the noblest specimens of the late Principessa's munificence and taste. This was a sad and awful sight indeed. The huge rafters crashed in quick succession; the gorgeous ceilings, with the graceful frescoes that decorated them, and the slight walls that upheld them, crumbled away before the devouring stream; the priceless efforts of the youthful pencils of Raffaele and of Domenichino crackled in the flames, like holly-leaves on a Christmas hearth; till at length the defaced statues and mutilated columns alone remained, the shattered landmarks of the glowing torrent that had passed, the lonely wrecks of that fiery tempest.

Where was the possessor of these unrivalled

treasures, while the senseless and heartless flames were thus preying upon the noblest portion of his inheritance? The faithful domestics, the startled vassals, the affrighted peasantry of the neighbourhood—all were pressing onward to the fatal scene, all were mourning for him, all were struggling yet to save what no wealth could repurchase, and no art could replace—and where was he? In a small summer-house, constructed at the extremity of the lower terrace, Montalto had deposited the exhausted Fernanda. There, heedless of everything but of her, he was pouring forth, at her feet, the now unrepressed tale of his distracted love, while the vanquished Marquesa, her arm still clinging to her preserver's neck, in vain endeavoured to arrest the impassioned strain.

“Now be silent, Montalto; pray be silent,” said she, at length. “This is no time and no place for such language. I can take all this for granted—but I must hear no more. Rather tell me again that you are sure that all are safe.”

"I can have no doubt of it," replied he; "though I have thought of none but you, I know that all were aroused in time to effect an easy escape."

"Nay, but I must insist upon your leaving me now, and going to ascertain positively that no one has been hurt."

Montalto arose reluctantly at this order, but scarcely had he reached the door of the pavilion, when he beheld Queen Maria, the Principessa di Colonna, and their two attendants, moving hastily in the same direction.

Many were the greetings exchanged between them and the Marquesa as soon as they met; but scarcely had the Queen been assured of her favourite's safety than she insisted upon Montalto's leaving them, to superintend the efforts still making to arrest the progress of the conflagration.

"He really is a singular youth," said she; "and something must have strangely disordered his brain. He seems to care no more for the destruction of his beautiful palazzo

than I should for the loss of my riding-rod."

"It certainly is," exclaimed, in her turn, Antonia, "the most extraordinary fire I have ever heard of. I can find no one who has the slightest notion of how and where it began. Some say that it was in his own room, others that it was in your Majesty's, and one equerry even assured me that it was in mine, though the wing in which I slept has not yet been touched."

"It is generally so," answered the Queen, hastily; "no one is ever anxious to be responsible for these accidents."

"I am happy to see, at all events," resumed the unwearied Principessa, "that the fire left your Majesty and your attendants more leisure for their toilet than I have had; or, indeed, Fernanda either, if I am to judge by the care with which she is drawing that military cloak around her. Happily for her, however, she is not quite unaccustomed to man's apparel."

Though nothing could appear to Fernanda more ill-timed than her fair friend's present

mirth, she could not but secretly concur with her in thinking that there was something particularly strange and singular in the late occurrences. She pressed her questions upon the Queen, who admitted that she had been roused, from the very first, by young Bedmar, and must therefore have witnessed more of what had taken place, than those who had been subsequently alarmed. But the vague and contradictory tenor of her Majesty's replies could not but excite fresh and stronger misgivings. These were in their turn increased when Antonia, having ascertained that Fernanda had been borne away by Montalto himself, suddenly exclaimed, clapping her hands—

“I will answer for it, the house has been fired by young Bedmar, for thus he has won his wager after all.”

Just then the page rushed in, and entreated his royal mistress to come with him to the upper terrace, to witness the splendid sight now presented by the conflagration.

“I am sure that it is your work, fair sir,”

said the Principessa to him, "and that, for reasons well known to yourself."

"The Senhor de la Souza can affirm," replied the laughing page, "that I was fast asleep in my chamber when he aroused me."

"Well now, let us go and see this awful sight," said Queen Maria, no less anxious, apparently, to interrupt the conversation than to witness the fire. "I suppose that you will come with me, Principessa; as for Fernanda, she must not stir yet, after the shock which she has received."

Thus was the Marquesa left alone, to meditate upon the conclusions which might be drawn from what she had heard and observed, until she was joined by Montalto, who calmly informed her that the flames were subsiding, and that one wing of the palazzo would probably still be saved.

Fernanda soon observed that her repeated inquiries as to the presumed origin of the fire, were answered in a less precise and satisfactory manner by the Principe himself, than by any of those whom she had as yet interro-

gated; and she could not also but remark that every detail of his toilet bore evidence that it had remained entirely unaltered since the previous evening. Thus her anxious curiosity soon prevailed over every other feeling, and, resolving at last positively to corroborate or set at rest the suspicions which were pressing more and more upon her mind, she gazed intently upon her lover, and said—

“You need torture your brain, fair Signor, no further, for artifices and conjectures. Queen Maria has told me all.”

The Principe's earnest look fully informed his mistress that her bold stroke had been successful. He fell at her feet, and, laying his head upon her fairy hand, he softly whispered—

“Could you but know all, indeed, you would, perhaps, forgive me. Remember to what desperation you had driven me, before I could be induced to resort to such a step.”

“And may I ask what object you have obtained, or hope to obtain, by this most extraordinary proceeding?”

"Alas, Fernanda!" replied Montalto; "I expect little, indeed, for you have too long taught me never again to hope. But of what has occurred to-night," continued he, his look and voice glowing with the fire that so long had preyed upon his heart, "of what has occurred to-night, nothing, not even your utmost resentment, can deprive me now. Do you reckon for naught that moment, when I—the rejected, the despised Montalto—was called by yourself into your chamber,—when I bore you, like a helpless child, in my arms, and pressed you to my heart? That was, indeed, worthy of being lived for! Think how the memory of that hour will brighten the last parting glance, that I hope soon to cast on this vain and deceitful world, when I shall have found, on the deadly breach, or in the headlong onslaught, that death that I am again about to seek out; think how my heart will leap to remember that maddening instant, when, through the roar of the flames, I heard you whispering in my ear that once, at least, I had been loved; when I felt your arm con-

vulsively encircling my neck; and when I tore you—you, Fernanda—the very idol of my soul—from the grasp of the Angel of Destruction. If you could but conceive or comprehend what is the love that you can inspire, you would know why this night is blessed and hallowed to me, beyond all those that have ever darkened the face of the creation; for it granted far more than Hope itself had ever ventured to imagine."

"Excuse me," answered Fernanda, "but I thought your object was to win the heart, and not to approach for an instant the unconscious and almost lifeless body."

"The heart, Fernanda! Is there a heart there, in that matchless form—a heart that may be won by any entreaty which Love can utter, or by any sacrifice that Despair can suggest?"

"I trust there is one there," replied the smiling Fernanda, "as physicians maintain that such an appendage is absolutely requisite for life. But though it might, perchance, yield to some true and rational cavalier, it can scarcely be called upon to surrender to a

mere maniac. Was ever such madness heard of, as thus to sacrifice all the beautiful treasures that we were yesterday admiring, during the whole evening?"

"Can you think, dearest, loveliest Fernanda, that all that ten thousand such houses could contain would be worth to me that smile, which is even now playing on your lips."

"Never mind my lips, you worthless and recreant knight; but rather tell me, how you expect me ever to forgive you, for exposing Queen Maria, the Principessa di Colonna, and so many other lives, to such imminent peril?"

"The Principessa's danger, dear Fernanda, has been very slight, as she must have told you herself. As to Queen Maria, would that I could induce you to abide by her judgment in the case!"

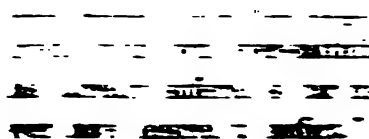
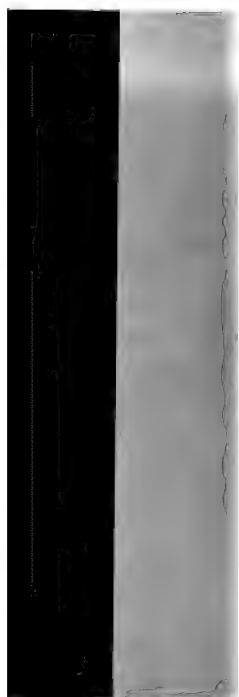
"Not at all, fair sir; I have my own quarrel to avenge. Do you reckon that this has been a pleasant reception that you have given me here, under your own roof, when, for once in my life, I claimed its hospitality for one night only? Are you aware that I was

on the very threshold of death, in consequence of this charming arrangement, ere you came to my assistance?"

"Here, I must confess, dearest Fernanda, that I have no excuse to plead, saving that utter distraction of mind to which you had driven me. The fact is, however, that we had no conception that you would bolt and bar, to such an extent, every approach to your chamber, thus giving the flames an advantage over us upon which we could not reckon."

"By us, I suppose you mean Queen Maria and yourself, and that I am equally beholden to both for the scheme which has so nearly cost me my life!"

"That question, dear Fernanda, the Queen will doubtless answer herself, as she seems to have no secrets for you. I can only confess my own misdeeds, and for these I crave here, at your feet, my forgiveness, for the sake of the fast-fleeting instant when our souls seemed united as if for ever, in that death-struggle against the raging flames. Nay, do not attempt to look so stern, Fernanda; I



## CHAPTER XIX.

THE contest was over—the proud, the rebel heart was vanquished and fast giving way. Again the gentle arm was encircling the neck of the impassioned youth, and the fair lips had been once, and once only, pressed to his marble brow,—when suddenly he beheld the bright colour fleeting from the lovely cheek of his mistress. Soon her eyes closed, apparently in the extremest agony of pain or dismay, and Montalto could just hear her faltering voice mutter the name of La Cerda. He sprang to his feet, as if expecting to see close at hand the giant form of the redoubted cavalier; but

Fernanda, restraining him, with a slight and convulsive smile, softly whispered—

“He is not here, dear Montalto, at least not yet; but the remembrance of him suddenly broke upon me to dispel this happy, happy dream. Leave me, for God’s sake, leave me! Day is breaking now; the night—this awful yet ever-blessed night—with the heavenly vision which it created but for an instant, has passed away! All must now be forgotten for ever, saving, that I have vowed my heart was free; and that, upon the truth of that vow, my life, and yours, best-beloved Montalto, fatally depend.”

“What do you mean, dear Fernanda?” exclaimed the enraptured lover. “That man breathes not, were he the Great Captain himself, who shall venture to stand between me and her whose heart responds to my love. Ere this sun sets, you shall have no further concern to take on Don Luis’s account. He shall this time find my sword-arm in condition to do its duty.”

“Speak not so, Montalto,” exclaimed the

breathless Fernanda, "as you value my regard—speak not so! Alas, you know it well, your slight arm is no match for his gigantic strength, nor your youth for his hardened experience of a thousand bloody deeds. There is no hope for our love in this world. In the name of the Blessed Virgin, let us part, ere it has given birth to some tragedy more awful than all the accumulated evils with which it has already beset the path of our ill-starred existence."

Montalto was urging, in the most impassioned terms, his distracted mistress to dismiss these harrowing apprehensions, and reminding her that he would now be fully enabled to meet La Cerda with every prospect of a fair and equal encounter, when their agitated discourse was interrupted by the entrance of Queen Maria, followed by Antonia Colonna.

On perceiving that her favourite was not alone, the Queen started back; but it was now too late to retire. She therefore informed the Principe that the flames appeared completely subdued, and asked his permission to withdraw

into some room of the wing of the palazzo which had been saved, that she might take, for a short time, that rest of which all were in need.

"Nay," continued she, "my dear Principe," as Montalto hastily rose to obey her summons, "pray merely lead the way. I do not want your arm, which poor Fernanda must require more than I do. How pale she still is."

"Indeed she is!" interposed Antonia. "Perhaps the Principe had better carry her again."

Fernanda appeared so much annoyed at this observation, that the Principessa thought it more prudent to abstain, for the present, from any similar allusion to what had taken place, and the whole party moved on towards the smouldering remnants of the palazzo. One wing being nearly untouched, arrangements were soon made which enabled her Majesty and her two fair attendants to repose in safety.

Upon awaking, at a late hour on the following day, from as deep a slumber as she had ever enjoyed, Queen Maria beheld the Marquesa di Sierra Hermosa sitting at the foot of her couch.

"What is it, my dear Fernanda?" ex-

claimed she, somewhat alarmed—"no further accident, I trust?"

"None whatsoever, that I am aware of," exclaimed she; "but as I could not sleep myself, I was watching the moment when your Majesty awoke, to request your gracious permission to say a few words to you."

"By all means, my dear. Nay, you need not kneel, as if you were presenting homage to me before my whole court. If you will show me any way in which I can oblige you, it will be the most welcome communication that I could possibly receive."

"Indeed, madam, I should be truly ungrateful were I to doubt, for an instant, the kind interest of which your Majesty has given me of late so many and such striking proofs. But there is much in the sad fate with which it has pleased Heaven to afflict me, which it is desirable that your Majesty should know, lest your kind friendship should unwillingly defeat its own object."

"Most decidedly," replied the Queen. "Pray, therefore, my dearest child, tell me

all that you feel at liberty  
desired to know the  
respect to what most  
though I have thought  
press no inquiries upon

"I have nothing to  
Majesty," replied the Mar-  
quis, "you will allow me, first  
questions of you?"

"Certainly, my dear.

"Then, may I in-  
quire has not deemed it expedient  
to bring me into closer communica-  
tion with a person, in short, who  
need not mention?"

"I have, my dear, no objection.

"And your Majesty  
person entertains for me  
continued the Marquesa, la-  
vish of her royal confidence,  
we must not attempt to

"Without a doubt."

"Whilst I myself may  
appear on all appearances, be not  
to respond to his sentiment

"Well, I suppose I must repeat, *mi querida*, what I already said last night, that such love as his, proceeding from such as he, bids fair, in my estimation, as it well deserves, to attain its uttermost object. Nay, I want no confessions, and I will accept of no denials. I have long since pledged my word that you and Montalto shall be united, and my pledge shall be redeemed."

"Alas! your Majesty is not aware," replied the dejected Fernanda, "that an insuperable barrier has been raised between us for ever."

"Insuperable — no, my dear Fernanda. There is a difficulty I know, which must be, and can be overcome. That difficulty is the more serious, I fear, that it was originally of your own creation. Nay, you need not groan so bitterly, and begin thinking of your convent again. After all, if I have been correctly informed, Don Luis holds no distinct pledge from you?"

"None indeed, by the Holy Virgin!" exclaimed Fernanda, "whether given, implied, or extorted."

“Then leave me to manage him, and I trust that he will soon be far away. Again that groan. Nay, do cheer up, my dear, and be yourself once more. I know all about La Cerda, full as well as you can, and that he is no child to deal with in these matters. But resentment and love are not the two sole passions of his heart, and I trust that I have that to promise which he will not lightly reject. Still,” continued Queen Maria, thoughtfully, “it certainly is desirable, that he should know, as late as possible, and indeed, as little as possible, what has occurred here.”

“Decidedly, madam, and it was upon this very point that I was desirous of claiming your Majesty’s kind intercession. Your Majesty is aware that there is one person here with you, whose discretion is not her principal charm.”

“Ay, indeed, my dear; and if Antonia Colonna was of our party, you must have guessed that it was by her positive will and much against mine. Still, she is really kind-hearted, by all accounts sincerely attached to

you, and convinced now, I believe, that Montalto has eyes for no one but his adored Fernanda. I think, therefore, that were we to take her into our councils, we should find it more easy to impress her with the absolute necessity of secrecy, than if we leave her to form her own conjectures. Come, do not look so solemn. I can speak to her, if you will not, and I really think that I can answer for her, as well as for La Souza and young Bedmar. Well, I know what you would add, but it is needless—I shall be very, very, very cautious. But now we had perhaps better make, as soon as possible, the requisite arrangements for our return to Palermo, as my plans had as well be followed up without further delay. My toilet will soon be finished, with your kind help. As to yours, I see that it is already concluded. Where on earth, may I ask, did you succeed in getting these accoutrements? They look, for all the world, like the ‘défroque’ of one of the family pictures consumed last night.”

“I am indebted for them,” replied Fernanda,

scarcely suppressing a smile, "to a venerable duenna, a confidential servant, I am told, of the late Principessa, who most kindly adapted for me, to present purposes, some of the apparel of her late mistress, which still happened to be in her possession."

In due course of time, the Queen was attired, the morning, or rather the afternoon repast was disposed of, and the whole hunting party, now joined by Montalto, proceeded back to Palermo. We will not pretend to know what occurred in the very long dialogue which took place on the way, between Queen Maria and the Principessa di Colonna; why the Senhor de la Souza seized this opportunity of exposing, at great length, to young Bedmar, the important revolution achieved in the art of modern warfare, by the introduction of artillery and fire-arms; or why the matchless eyes of Fernanda were so often raised, as if in tender admonition, while Montalto was whispering at her side what none but she could hear. We will merely say, that the progress of the noble party was, upon the whole, tolerably rapid;

and that the fair city of Palermo was reached just as the shades of evening were darkening into nightfall.

Queen Maria's first care, upon alighting from her horse, was to despatch young Bedmar to the Vice-queen, to request that she would be so good as to come to her as soon as convenient. The Duquesa lost no time in obeying this summons, and a long and animated conversation ensued between these two illustrious persons, in which the altered prospects of the enterprise upon which they were intent were fully canvassed and discussed. The impression left upon the mind of the sagacious Doña Inez, by the details which her royal companion communicated to her, was confirmed, on the following morning, during an interview which she had with Fernanda herself, in which she succeeded in extracting from the reluctant Marquesa, an implicit avowal, that the dreaded presence of La Cerda at Palermo was now the principal obstacle to the success of the ardent Montalto's suit. It thus became, more than ever, evident to all the parties interested, that

the removal of Don Luis was the real object to be achieved.

The ingenuity and practised experience of Queen Maria, were first brought into the field for this purpose. She sent for La Cerda, honoured him with a long and private interview, and expatiated with the utmost skill and tact upon the bright prospects which the mission that she had reserved for him to the person of the King, her father, must open to his ambition. The swarthy soldier listened, in very respectful yet ominous silence, to everything that fell from her Majesty; but finally requested that she would allow him to decline her most gracious and flattering offers, as business of importance, and a disinclination for any political service at present, detained him at Palermo.

It was now the Viceroy's turn to attempt to sway the decisions of the inflexible cavalier. The sturdy warrior, less guarded by nature than his royal ally, attempted no concealment of the object he had in view; but entered at once upon the real question at

issue, as soon as he was closeted alone with his former companion in arms.

"So you have refused, La Cerda, Queen Maria's proposed mission to the court of her father?"

"I have," replied La Cerda.

"Positively?"

"Positively."

"Are you aware of her Majesty's motives for wishing you to leave Palermo, independently of the sincere interest which she, in common with us all, feels in your future welfare?"

"I am," answered La Cerda, rather sarcastically, "and I believe that they very much outweigh the latter consideration to which you are so good as to allude."

"You will excuse my asking you one question more. You know that the discretionary power rests with me, to remove from Sicily any subject of the King, our gracious Master, whose residence here may appear to me unadvisable?"

"I am aware that such extraordinary powers are vested in you, for political purposes only."

“There is no limitation at all,” calmly interposed the Viceroy.

“You know best,” resumed La Cerda. “May I, in my turn, ask to what this conversation is tending?”

“La Cerda,” said the Viceroy, “we have long known each other. You remember the breach of Granada, where our acquaintance first began?”

“I do indeed, sir,” replied La Cerda—“Never shall I forget the heroic courage which you displayed there, as elsewhere; but perhaps you may remember, also, that I was not far from you in that onslaught?”

“I have not forgotten it, Luis, but I also remember, about the same time, Paquita de Herrera and her end.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Don Luis, quailing for a moment before the stern glance which the Viceroy was fixing upon him, as if to read into his very soul—“She died young, in truth; but she was fully warned ere she rushed upon her fate.”

“You will understand me, when I say that

such dark deeds must not be repeated at Palermo."

"I am not aware," answered the ruthless warrior, "that I have as yet received any similar provocation here."

"With the view you may take of your own grievances," retorted the Viceroy, "I am not called upon to interfere. What I wish to impress upon you, is, that wherever I am bound to exercise the authority of the Crown of Spain, no woman, however humble or however exalted may be her station, shall be influenced, in the free disposal of her heart, by any others than her legitimate protectors. Now, if I am rightly informed, De la Cerda, you have lately attempted, and perhaps are still endeavouring to overawe, by the mere terror which your well-known disposition may inspire, a person in whose fate we all must take the deepest interest."

No words could describe the fierce fire of resentment that burned in Don Luis's eye, as, calmly and deliberately, the Viceroy uttered the foregoing observation. For an instant his

hand convulsively grasped the hilt of his poniard, but he succeeded in partially mastering his emotion ere, slowly rising from his seat, he said—

“Your grace is evidently aware, as I shall endeavour to remember myself, that the difference of age and present station preclude me from seeking here that redress which any un-called-for interference in my private concerns has ever appeared to me to claim. Still, you have known me long enough to be aware also, that, unfortunately perhaps for me, nature has not endowed me with a very enduring disposition; and I think it as well that this interview should end, ere either of us should entirely forget what we mutually owe to each other.”

“Not so, if you please,” answered the Viceroy, with unshaken firmness. “I am now executing a duty, which, though painful, is incumbent upon me. You can correct the information that I have received, should it appear to you inaccurate. In the meantime, I have every reason to believe that your presence at Palermo is now the sole obstacle to an union which, for many weighty reasons,

we are most anxious to bring about. I am at a loss to conceive how it could be any satisfaction for you, to witness an event which you cannot now prevent, but which must be most painful to you, in the present state of your feelings. I therefore think that I am consulting your own interest, as well as that of others, when I give you full and fair warning, that by that vessel, which you can see there in the harbour, you must leave Palermo, on the day after to-morrow. It remains with you to decide, whether you will go as the confidential messenger of Queen Maria to the King her father, or under such escort as a state prisoner of your rank is entitled to claim. Now you are free to retire."

"Not, by Heaven!" exclaimed the impetuous cavalier, "until I have reminded you that none as yet has insulted or injured me with impunity, and until I have solemnly defied you, as I do now, to carry into execution upon my person this most unjustifiable menace." With these words, Don Luis abruptly rushed from the apartment.

While the negotiations in which her pros-

pects were so intimately concerned, were thus proceeding in no very satisfactory manner, where was the distracted Marquesa herself? On the night of her return from the castle of Montalto, she had reached her palazzo, her heart still throbbing with the long repressed, but unconquered feelings which the tale of Montalto's love had awakened there in all their heavenly rapture. But as she approached her toilet-table, why was the brightness of the beaming eye so suddenly quenched? why did the colour fly so fast from the glowing cheek? why did the ill-fated beauty lean for support against the richly carved arm of the massive chair at her side?—On this table she had beheld a small folded scrap of paper, which, with prophetic terror, she scarcely ventured to open. No one knew, or, at least, no one would say, how or when it had come there. At last it was unfolded by the small and tremulous hand, which had long clasped it in unaccountable dismay, and it was found to contain only one word in an unknown hand. But that word was—

“BEWARE.”

For several minutes Fernanda gazed, in gloomy abstraction, upon the ominous missive. Then, suddenly rushing to her jewel-casket, she drew from it the bleeding heart, last token of the Principe's love, and, pressing it convulsively to her lips, as if it were a charmed talisman, she fervently exclaimed, as she retired to her rest, "The die is now cast, Montalto; at all risks I will be thine."

When, after a weary and sleepless night, the Marquesa on the following day arose from her couch, she found, with unavailing despair, that no effort of her mind, nor even the many ardent prayers which she had poured forth to the Holy Virgin, could dispel the superstitious feeling of awe which the sight of that small scrap of paper, with its mysterious warning, still awakened within her. In vain she tore it to atoms, and destroyed every fragment of it by the light of one of the perfumed wax-tapers which adorned her dressing-table. An iron hand seemed still to press upon her heart; during the whole day the fearful word appeared inscribed wherever her anxious gaze might rest; the fatal train of

thoughts which it aroused was ever forcing itself upon her fevered brain; and yet she could not muster sufficient courage to impart this slight incident to any one, not even to Doña Inez herself, during the very confidential conversation to which we have already alluded.

Great as was this disinclination of the Marquesa, to mention either this occurrence, or any matter connected in her mind, whether directly or indirectly, with her redoubted kinsman, she could not but perceive, both on that day and on the following, that Queen Maria, the Duquesa, and even Montalto himself, felt more surprise than they thought it courteous to express, at her reluctance to see Don Luis. It was clear to her that, in their estimation, a frank avowal of all that he must soon otherwise learn by hearsay, would place her own relations with him upon a more satisfactory footing, and enable her friends themselves to act with greater freedom. That this would be the fairer and more honourable course to pursue, after all that had occurred between them, she also well felt; but the mere thought of

meeting the dread La Cerda, under such circumstances, entirely paralysed all her wonted firmness. Thus, ere she had mustered courage herself to address him, and request him to come to her, she received a note from him, written after his audience of the Viceroy, and demanding a short interview with her. Twice were the few lines traced which granted the required appointment, and twice was the frail record destroyed. At length, her fear fairly overpowering every other sentiment, the Marquesa determined upon avoiding, if possible, the dreaded ordeal, and her answer to her cousin's request was couched in the following terms:—

“ I have received your note, and would willingly see you, could I think that, under present circumstances, an interview would be agreeable to the feelings, or conducive to the interests, of either. But while I have nothing to communicate which it can give you any pleasure to hear, you have doubtless nothing to say which can convey much gratification to me. When last we met, La Cerda, you com-

pelled me to speak in terms the more painful to you proclaimed my truest feelings uttered or implied, I struggled to repeat, and hence I might in frankness disclose, would, I fear, be to you than all I then in De la Cerda, think no brightest prospects which can imagine, are opening cast away, in a useless suit, the noble gifts of fortune now within your reach. Thankful for the friendship you moments of great distress for your happiness and gratitude nor friendship heart. And that heart was, as I much fear now the day when our more was renewed, however I to deceive myself."

"Farewell, La Cerda attend you."

When this letter was delivered to Don Luis, he was pacing his chamber, with all the smouldering fury of the captive tiger flashing in his dark eye. But the deathlike paleness which overspread his countenance, on perusing the fatal missive, startled even the page himself who delivered it, accustomed as he was to all the varying moods of his master's intractable disposition. For more than an hour La Cerda continued his solitary walk, in almost frantic agitation. At length his attendant was summoned, and desired to convey, in all haste, a note to the palazzo of the Principe di Montalto.

Scarcely had the youthful messenger departed upon his errand, than he was seized upon, in the name of the Viceroy, and conveyed to the government palace, where, after a minute search, his master's note, which he had been unwilling to deliver, was discovered. The consequence was, a command from the Duque to place the Principe di Montalto and Don Luis under the strictest arrest; and so rapidly was this order enforced upon the person of La

Cerda, that, ere he could be aware that such a step had been resolved upon, his house was surrounded, his domestics disarmed, and he himself called upon to surrender his sword. Seeing that all attempt at resistance must be unprofitably fatal, the practised soldier broke his weapon in speechless resentment, and hurling the fragments at the guards who filled his room, peremptorily desired them to leave him in solitude for the night.

We will not attempt to describe how that night was passed;—the wild ravings, the awful and blasphemous imprecations, the raging fury and despair. But the foaming billows grow weary, at length, of wasting their strength against the immoveable rock; and when the early dawn broke upon that wild storm of human passion, its fiercer outbursts were beginning to subside through mere exhaustion. La Cerda then summoned a confidential equerry, who for many years had been the unscrupulous follower of his varied fortunes, and even, it was said, the sharer of some of his most secret counsels; and the long conversation which

ensued between them seemed to restore the frenzied warrior to nearly his wonted calmness.

At mid-day he was informed that the Viceroy's secretary desired to see him. When introduced, this functionary stated that the wind was fair, the vessel bound for the coast of Spain on the point of starting, and that he was ordered to ascertain the Señor de La Cerda's decision, with reference to the conversation which had taken place, the day before, between the Viceroy and him.

Apparently to the surprise of the official, Don Luis declared that he was perfectly ready to leave Palermo, and that he hoped to be entrusted with the Queen of Portugal's commands for her royal father. Within an hour the Senhor de la Souza called with Her Majesty's despatches. Every preparation was then made, for their master's departure and their own, by La Cerda's retinue, and before nightfall, the whole party were on board, and standing out to sea, with the exception of the single equerry, whom we have lately mentioned,

and who remained behind in charge, as was stated by him, of some property which was to be disposed of at Palermo.

When it was duly ascertained that the grim cavalier was actually in the Spanish galleon, which itself was already actually out of sight, great indeed was the exultation that pervaded the small coterie which surrounded Queen Maria, and many were the compliments paid to the Viceroy upon the consummate ability and firmness by which this unhopèd-for result had been so successfully and speedily achieved. It was long before Fernanda could be induced to credit the intelligence, nor was she satisfied until it was conveyed to her by the most distinct and repeated testimonies, accompanied by the assurance that every precaution had been adopted by the Viceroy, in connexion with the captain of the vessel, himself a well-known and trustworthy agent, to guard against the possibility of La Cerda's prematurely leaving the ship. Then, at length, the deep gloom which had of late so fatally beset the Marquesa's path, seemed gradually to be dis-

pelled, the light of former days shone in her bright eyes, and the long-banished smile resumed its wonted seat upon her lips.

And now, who will describe the rapture of the youthful lovers, so long and so cruelly parted, so sorely tried, so unexpectedly united at last in the blessed consummation of their wildest visions and hopes. Who will attempt to retrace those hours unceasingly spent by Montalto at the feet of his Heaven-restored Fernanda; while the whole tale of the sufferings, the remorse, the despair of each heart during its loneliness, was so often interrupted by the kindred confession—and while each sought words which could sufficiently convey that mutual possession of the entranced soul, which such passion as theirs can never grow weary of imparting and receiving. This was happiness indeed—a happiness not of this being and of this life, but one of those rare and transient thrills of the imprisoned spirit, as, released for some fast-fleeting hour, it soars into the bright regions of its appointed undying bliss—how soon, alas to be recalled!

It would be sin, in or to curtail such happiness can we blame the ill friends of Fernanda, the necessity of no longer templated nuptials? in this suit none was youthful lover himself Marquesa's consent long pedition was then use parties concerned, the rather complicated nature which were to take place fixed within three weeks La Cerda had been ren

## CHAPTER XX.

THE eventful morning came, as splendid as the prospects of the illustrious pair about to be united by the most sacred of ties, as brilliant as the hopes which the auspicious occurrence awakened amongst the noblest of Sicily and of Spain.

At the metropolitan church of Palermo, decked in its richest and most fantastic attire, the Archbishop, accompanied by the whole parochial clergy, was in waiting, to officiate in person during the forthcoming ceremony. The Queen of Portugal, attended by as gorgeous a retinue as ever followed upon the footsteps of Royalty, soon entered, to grace the

solemnity with her presence; and so dense was the throng of Sicilian and Spanish cavaliers and high-born dames that pressed in her suite, that the vast aisle which she traversed seemed to overflow with the glittering stream of mingled silk, brocade, gilded armour, and jewellery. Behind this truly regal train, the more sober burgesses, with their wives and daughters, hung like a dark fringe around the lustrous and waving expanse of living figures which tapestried the greater portion of the cathedral. Nor were the sturdy countrymen wanting, each in charge of some dark-eyed Contadina, many of whom had walked since daybreak, that they might gaze for an instant, in their nuptial hour, upon the far-famed Principe di Montalto, the flower of Sicilian chivalry, and the unrivalled widow of the late Viceroy, the beauteous Marquessa de Sierra Hermosa.

At length the deafening cheers of the crowd without, announced the approach of the illustrious and highly-blessed couple. As the compact mass, which now nearly filled the

body of the church, opened to make way for them, before the halberts of the vice-regal guards, many were the exclamations of sympathy and of admiration which burst from those who were fortunate enough to behold the objects of universal curiosity and interest. The lofty bearing of Montalto, his manly countenance, his princely attire, called forth unanimous tokens of approbation. Scarcely, indeed, could he forbear smiling himself at the expression of awe, amounting almost to veneration, with which a young peasant girl, who had been pressed forward by the crowd behind her upon his path, drew back, as if in fear of desecrating, by the slightest touch of her picturesque but homely apparel, one fold of his embroidered mantle. As to Fernanda, her slender and graceful figure, her exquisitely chiselled features, and her languishing eyes, were no less highly extolled than was deserved. But there was a paleness upon her cheek, a contraction upon her brow, and a tremulous agitation upon her quivering lips, which gave rise to more than one criticism, particularly

among the fairer portion of the by-standers; and an Italian cavalier, arrived on the night before from Naples, was even overheard to express very strong disappointment at the appearance of the Spanish beauty.

They approached the spot where Queen Maria had taken her station; and now, so evident became the emotion of the lovely bride, and so anxious the stolen glances which she would cast around, as if in fear of beholding some dreaded vision arising from amid the dazzling throng, that many an eye was painfully arrested. It was even remarked that the Queen was constrained to respond, by some expression of encouragement, to the proffered homage of her favourite; and that Montalto himself endeavoured to recall a faint smile to her lips by a whispered word of tender admonition.

When the ceremony began, paler and paler grew the fair cheek, the slight hand more and more tremulous, and, as the solemn vows were to be pronounced, the faltering voice was absolutely inaudible. The venerable prelate

was well aware how common great agitation is under similar circumstances, and how often, indeed, it is simulated, even where it may not be felt with becoming intensity: still, so overpowering were the feelings betrayed by Fernando, notwithstanding her utmost efforts to master them, that he actually experienced some misgivings in concluding the service. As, however, the anxious look, both of Queen Maria and of the Viceroy, seemed ever urging him to proceed, and as no objection was raised by the principal parties, or by the witnesses, the sacred rite was continued, and, in time, duly administered. No sooner was the whole solemnity over, than, appalled himself, at length, by the exhausted appearance of his bride, Montalto hastened, as much as courtesy would admit, to remove her from the heated atmosphere of the church; and, with the assistance of the guards on duty at the massive portals, he soon deposited her almost insensible form in the splendid silken litter which was to convey her from the holy precincts.

Though both the Queen of Portugal and the

Viceroy had repeatedly expressed their earnest desire, that the Principe and Fernanda should remain at Palermo after the marriage, to assist in person, according to the more general custom of the times, at the brilliant festivities which had been prepared in honour of their union, nothing could overcome the Marquesa's desire to retire from the court, so soon as the religious ceremony should be concluded. Thus it was at her express request, that Montalto had ordered that portion of his château which had escaped from the flames, to be made ready for their immediate reception. His own feelings would have prompted him not to proceed thither so soon; but what bridegroom could have withstood the touching appeals repeatedly made by Fernanda, to the effect that the spot which had witnessed their reconciliation, under such striking and memorable circumstances, should also behold the blessed consummation of all their earthly wishes and hopes? Every arrangement had consequently been made, to enable the newly-married couple at once to proceed to this destination.

No sooner had the gorgeous litter, borne by two Andalusian steeds of the highest blood, moved on, than Montalto, mounted on a splendidly caparisoned charger, surrounded by a brilliant assemblage of his youthful friends, and followed by a princely retinue of domestics, both on horseback and on foot, proceeded to escort his precious charge. Loud were the cheers of the crowd, as the gallant array advanced through the streets, where nearly every flagstone was concealed under the strewn masses of boughs, flowers, and silken emblems, while from every window handkerchiefs were waved, and glad faces were seen joyfully mingling in the universal tribute. Thus were the outer gates of the fair city reached; and then each youthful cavalier, with many an appropriate compliment, took his jovial farewell of the happy bridegroom, and suffered him to continue his journey with the chosen partner of his destiny, and the select band of retainers who were to accompany them.

With all convenient haste the dismantled castle was reached, and oh! how far fairer did

it seem to each fond heart, in its desolate and dilapidated appearance, than when, in all the pride of its beauty, it had so coldly smiled before upon their hopeless estrangement! Yet, were these blackened walls—these fire-stricken ragments—these frowning ruins—a fitting bower for the couch of such love as theirs? Was the screech-owl, whose mournful cry from his newly-selected home so relentlessly pierced the tranquil bosom of the evening air, a becoming herald of their promised happiness?

Having with difficulty persuaded his weary bride to partake of some slight refreshment, Montalto led her upon the terraces without, and there, although the tenderest vows of that mutual and impassioned devotion were as freely responded to as they were proffered, no effort on his part could for long recall the drooping Fernanda from the gloomy abstraction into which her spirits seemed ever wandering. So contagious, at last, became this unconquerable sadness, that Montalto himself felt an unaccountable sentiment of awe stealing upon him, in the lonely recesses of the dark and silent

garden; and he finally induced his bride to return to the house, and retire to her much-required rest. The faithful Rosetta, who had accompanied her mistress, was found in waiting on the steps, and they both together proceeded to the nuptial chamber.

No sooner had the door been closed, and had the favourite attendant approached the toilet-table, than she joyfully exclaimed—

“ Oh, dear madam, so you have found your ring at last!”

“ What ring, child?” cried the astonished Principessa.

“ Why, that little ring which your highness used to value so much, and which was lost on the day that we landed at Barcelona.”

“ Well, what of it?” whispered Fernanda, in a faltering voice. “ I have never beheld it since.”

“ Why, madam, here it is, on your table; and the Holy Virgin alone knows how it came there, if you do not.”

With a tremulous hand Fernanda seized the slight circlet: it was, indeed, her long-che-

rished, her long-lost ring. She examined it carefully, and found it still bore Petrarcha's verse—

“Una notte e mai fosse l'alba.”

She slowly and distinctly read each word of the mystical inscription; and then, as if some strange and fearful import had suddenly flashed upon her mind, she fell senseless to the floor.

The screams of the terrified Rosetta soon summoned Montalto, but he could throw no light upon the occurrence; and the youthful attendant, hastily despatched to gather what information she could obtain in the house, shortly returned, having ascertained nothing. The distracted Principe thought it therefore more advisable, so soon as he had succeeded in restoring Fernanda's consciousness, to state that the ring, which she now beheld, had been ordered and deposited there, at his desire, to replace that which, as she had lately informed him, she had herself lost with so much regret. This assurance, though conveyed in a manner which must have raised some misgivings in the mind of any attentive observer, apparently

quieted the more recent alarms of Fernanda, and Rosetta was dismissed, with an order to enter at noon on the following day, if not previously summoned. As she was preparing to retire, she distinctly heard her mistress say—

“Pray fasten the door, dearest Montalto.”

“Certainly, *anima mia*,” returned the Principe; “but I see no bar. Well, are you going to faint again? Santa Maria! what a child I have married, though certainly the loveliest of the creation! Cannot you guess that our sapient Camarera Mayor must have removed that bar, and very wisely too, to prevent, in case of accident, your life being again imperilled by a senseless and dangerous precaution? See, your maid is perfectly ashamed of you: we certainly shall not mistake her for a young man again to-night, shall we, Rosetta? Come, are you never to smile again, even upon me, *sposina mia*?”

The answer was such as to render it incumbent upon the tire-woman to withdraw, notwithstanding the anxiety she naturally must

have felt at leaving her beloved mistress in so unrecogential a frame of mind.

On the following day, when the appointed hour of noon had struck, Rosetta, having received no previous summons, approached, with a light step, the door of the resting chamber, which she gently opened; but so deep was the repose within, that she determined to wait for some short time ere she broke upon the tranquil slumbers of the inmates.

Another hour of undisturbed stillness elapsed, and then, fearful of departing too far from the orders that she had received, the faithful attendant entered the room. No sound could be overheard as she traversed its lonely darkness, and reached the carefully closed shutter, which she partially opened. The impatient daylight then burst, in a glittering stream, through the apartment; and, dazzled herself by the sudden transition, Rosetta turned hastily away.

God of Heaven, what a sight! Blood, blood, blood! On the costly hangings, on the

gorgeous carpeting, on the snowy covering of the nuptial couch itself, the fearful tale of Death was inscribed, in the ghastly handwriting of Murder.

Breathless with horror, Rosetta rushed towards the bed—there they lay, in all the unfailing beauty of their youth, closely folded in the long-promised embrace of their enraptured souls, their whole being linked together by the sainted union of their hearts, even in their unconscious repose. But oh, how far deeper and more unmoved that rest than the sleep of life! and as the gasping waiting woman drew near the silent couch, the solemn stillness of the grave seemed to arise from it, to expand around and slowly to enshroud her, until her troubled vision was obscured, and her oppressed senses gave way.

In the meantime, one piercing shriek that she had uttered at first had summoned another attendant from a neighbouring room. Soon a third appeared, and then a fourth, as, with the mysterious rapidity which appertains to all fatal intelligence, the fearful tale spread through the whole house.

A closer inspection then ensued, but alas! it served only to confirm to the utmost the dread forebodings of the first glance. Death alone was there! A thrice repeated thrust of some fell weapon had thrice traversed each faithful bosom; apparently without a single struggle, their eternal union had been sealed, by a decree more binding than the Holy Church's most Holy Sacrament; and, according to the wild vow of one impassioned hour, the nuptial night of their love was to see no dawn.

A messenger was forthwith despatched to the Viceroy, who, in all haste, proceeded to the spot, closely followed by the principal civil and judicial authorities, and the strictest investigation into every circumstance then took place. No information, however, could be obtained which threw any light upon the dread tragedy, saving the confused statement of one inferior domestic, who had seen two strangers loitering in the neighbourhood of the house during the course of the afternoon, and had warned them off, by a short and peremptory summons, which had seemingly been immediately and willingly obeyed. The description given of one of these

persons corresponding, in some respects, with the appearance of the equerry whom La Cerda had left behind, an order for the arrest of this attendant was immediately given; but he had quitted Palermo two days previously, having disposed of all his master's effects, and no clue could be discovered as to the route which he had taken. The Viceroy was thus constrained, when informing the Spanish court of the sad occurrence, to state the grounds which undeniably existed for entertaining some suspicions with respect to Don Luis himself. The ship which bore this despatch was unfortunately long delayed by a most adverse passage; and when the Sicilian Governor's intimation reached Madrid, La Cerda had already sailed for the unexplored shores of that New World, then the object of such general speculation and enterprise, in a vessel which had been entrusted to him for that purpose by the King. Still, the legal proceedings, though complicated by so many untoward incidents, were continued during some years; nor, indeed, were they completely abandoned until authentic accounts had been

forwarded of the death of Don Luis during an engagement, which, at the head of a handful of followers, he had rashly adventured with a whole army of natives.

The consternation which the mysterious and appalling end of the youthful Principe and Principessa di Montalto created in the gay court and fair city of Palermo, could scarcely have been surpassed, had the intelligence been received that the dreaded legions of France were again in possession of the island. None was too high, and few too poor, to repair to the spot where, now decked, by the affectionate care of their attendants, in the unsullied apparel of the grave, the ill-starred couple reposed in state for three days and three nights, surrounded by all the pomp which the Church can impart to the chamber of death. Many a tear was shed for the untimely end of the brilliant and well-beloved Montalto, but the appearance of the slight and fragile form of Fernanda seemed to excite still greater commiseration. Few indeed of those who had known her in the gayer and more playful moods of her wayward and

intractable disposition, could forbear to weep, when they thought that that bright eye was to shine, and to smile, and to fascinate no more, and when they beheld the awful penalty that had visited the follies of her misguided youth. In this long train of mourners, none were more sincere, none more heart-stricken than Queen Maria herself. And, as if in expiation of the somewhat imprudent zeal with which she had precipitated the issue of Montalto's suit, she herself endowed the monastery, into which the remnant of the heirless Principe's villa was converted, and erected, at her own expense, the contiguous chapel, where he and his one-day's bride for ever repose.

Should you ever, gentle reader, be tempted to undertake, as I have done, the land journey from Palermo to Catania, you will do well to accept, on your first night, the bountiful hospitality of the worthy friars of Montalto, if their homely institution has survived the late political convulsions. You will there hear the foregoing sad tale told with much better grace and feeling than

belong to me. You will see what will speak to your heart far more than all that either the venerable fathers or I could relate — the now mouldering tomb of Montalto and Fernanda, before the rude simplicity of which Canova is reported to have shed tears. You will be assured, that the nameless pupil of Michael Angelo, to whose chisel the monument is attributed, himself beheld the lying in state, and attempted to retrace, in the gaunt marble figures that recline on the upper slab, the vaunted beauty of their originals. Above all, you will be shown, though scarcely discernible now, the inscribed legend of that short-lived but Heaven-blessed union—

“UNA NOTTE E MAI FOSSE L’ALBA!”

THE END.



